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Daniel
The Beloved Man

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**His Holiness Pope Tawdros the 2nd
Pope of Alexandria
& Patriarch of St. Mark's Diocese**

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Introduction

The Holy Bible contains exciting and interesting stories, and many great characters. It includes between its pages the lives of many great prophets and heroes of faith. But only one of them was called the beloved man; he was the prophet Daniel.

As we study Daniel's character, we will see that he stood at crossroads and he had to choose.

Either to live in Nebuchadnezzar's palace and forget his God and His commandments, enjoying all of the earthly pleasures including royal food

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and drink. As a captive, not in control of his life and destiny, he would have been totally excused for choosing this wide and easy road, which many others had chosen.

Or give up willingly all of this and choose not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and in this way he would expose his life to danger by disobeying the royal commandments. And this was the narrow gate, the difficult road that only few people travel along.

People's lives are summed up in those two roads; the wide road and the narrow road. And we find ourselves like Daniel always standing at crossroads and we have to choose

*Introduction

which road to travel. And many of us travel zigzagging between the two roads; although we walk in God's road it doesn't prevent us from enjoying the pleasures of the world ...

If we were in Daniel's shoes, what would we choose?!

Let's study Daniel's character, and know which road he chose for himself. We could learn from his life choices. He spent seventy years in Babylon in a very high position (prime minister) in the royal palace; but in spite of all the busyness and competition that he faced, he stayed faithful to his God even when the price was to be thrown into the lion's den. Our Lord doesn't leave His faithful

*Introduction

children. He sends His angels to shut the mouths of the lions so that no evil harms them.

We will look at:

- 1- Who is Daniel?
- 2- Daniel in captivity.
- 3- The three youths in the fiery furnace.
- 4- Nebuchadnezzar's dream is fulfilled.
- 5- The end of the Kingdom of Babylon.
- 6- Daniel in the lion's den.
- 7- Daniel's visions and their interpretation.

Remember me in your prayers.

Father Daoud Lamei

*Who is Daniel?



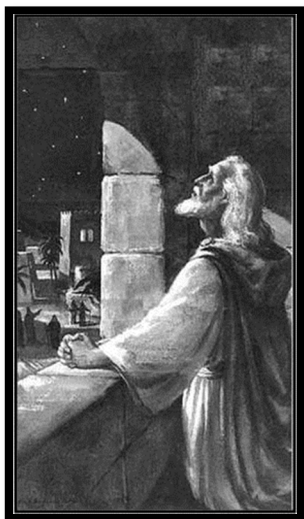
An overview of the Old Testament history through the main biblical characters will help us understand Daniel's place:

Adam ... Noah and the flood ... then Abraham (almost 2000 B.C.) and Isaac ... then Jacob ... then Joseph who went down to Egypt and his brothers followed. They were slaves there until Moses came (almost 1500 B.C.) and brought them out to Sinai, than Joshua took them into the Promised Land.

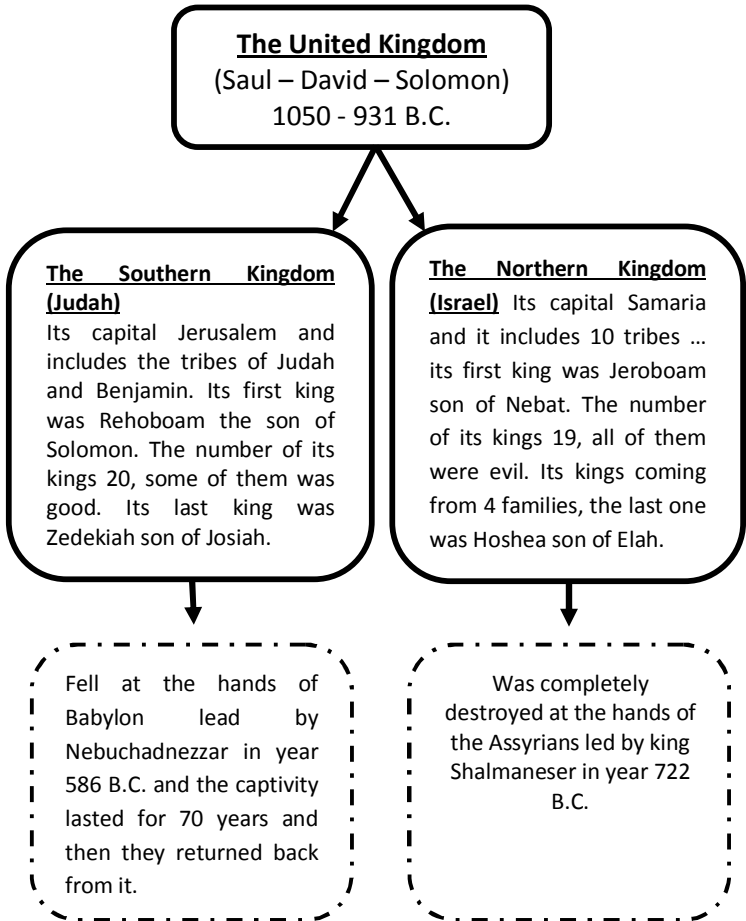
After Joshua's death began the period of judges which included Gideon and Jephthah and Samson. The prophet

*Who is Daniel?

Samuel is considered the last judge, as the people asked him to have a king like the other nations, and Saul the son of Kish became the first king for the Kingdom of Israel followed by King David (almost 1000 B.C.) then his son Solomon.



*Who is Daniel?



*Who is Daniel?

Southern Prophets		Southern Kings	Year B.C	Northern Kings	Northern Prophets
855 - 840	Obadiah	931 – 915 Rehoboam son of Solomon	931	931-915 Jeroboam	909 - 934 Ahijah
		914 – 912 Abijam	925	Solomon's slave Nadab 910-909	
835- 796	Joel	912 – 871 Asa	900	909-886 Baasha 885-886 Elah 885 Zimri	848-875 Elijah
		871-848 Jehoshaphat One of the good kings	875	885-874 Omri 873-853 Ahab	
		848-841 Jehoshaphat	850	853-852 Ahazia	797 - 848 Elisha
		841 Ahziah	825	852-841 Jehoram	
		840-835 Athaliah		800	841-813 Jehu
		835-796 Joash One of the good kings	775		797-813 Jehoahaz 782-797 Jehoash
		796-767 Amaziah		750	747-782 Jeroboam 2 nd
		767-739 Jotham			747 Zachariah

*Who is Daniel?

Judah's kingdom			Israel's kingdom	
Southern Prophets	Southern Kings	Year B.C	Northern Kings	Northern Prophets
740 - 680 663-654 640 - 620 627 - 586	734-728 Ahaz 728-699 <u>Hezekiah</u> One of the good kings 699-643 Manasseh	750	747 Shallum 747-742 Menahem 742 – 740 Prkahia	760-750 Amos 753-715 Hosea
		725	740-731 Pekah 731-723 Hoshea 722 <u>Jesusalem's</u>	
		700	<u>Captivity</u>	
		675		
	642-640 Amon 640-609 <u>Josi</u> One of the good kings 609 Jehoahaz 609-598 Jehoakim 598-597 Jehoackin 597-587 Zedekiah 586 Babylonian Captivity	650		
		625		
		600	605 <u>First Babylonian Captivity</u> (included Daniel)	
		586	597 <u>Second Babylonian Captivity</u> (included Ezekiel)	
		586 <u>Third Babylonian Captivity</u> (Jerusalem's Desolation)		

*Who is Daniel?

During that period God didn't stop sending His prophets to those two kingdoms to encourage people to repent. Sadly, only few of them did.

The prophets of Israel **(The Northern kingdom)**

- **Elijah:** destroyed the Baal altar and killed its prophets and was taken up to heaven alive in a chariot of fire.
- **Elisha:** Prophet of grace who carried a double portion of Elijah's spirit and did double his miracles.
- **Jonah:** He called Nineveh to repentance (the capital of Assyria which captured them later).
- **Amos:** the prophet of woe who came to announce God's judgment on sinners.

*Who is Daniel?

- **Hosea:** God asks His unfaithful people to come back to Him and likened them to an unfaithful wife.

Judah's prophets **(the southern Kingdom)**

- **Joel:** God's people became like a field invaded by locusts. And the prophet calls them to repent.
- **Micah:** warning people from the coming judgment.
- **Isaiah:** salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Nahum:** announcing God's judgment on Assyria and consoling Judah with this fact.
- **Zephaniah:** no partiality in discipline and the near coming of Judah's captivity.

*Who is Daniel?

- **Jeremiah:** confirming the fulfillment of captivity and the need for restoration of people's hearts.
- **Habakkuk:** the domination of the captors (Chaldeans) is temporary, and God is still controlling all matters.

The fall of the two kingdoms

Captivity of the Northern Kingdom **(Kingdom of Israel) by Assyria**

Assyria was in north Iraq and its capital was Nineveh. The Kingdom of Israel fell at the hands of Shalmaneser King of Assyria. King Hoshea of Israel had offered him allegiance but then rebelled against him relying on Egypt's Pharaoh for protection. Shalmaneser besieged Samaria for three years after which the city was destroyed, the people were

*Who is Daniel?

evacuated, and the Kingdom of Israel ended in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:3-6).

The captivity of the Southern Kingdom (Judah's Kingdom)



Babylon was in south Iraq. The Babylonian Kingdom became stronger as Assyria weakened. The Kingdom of Judah was captured by the Babylonians lead by

*Who is Daniel?

Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and they remained in captivity for 70 years.

Nebuchadnezzar II

He was the greatest of the kings of Babylon, and he reigned for 43 years (605 - 562 B.C.). Nebuchadnezzar marched onto Judah in three stages. In 597 B.C. he invaded Jerusalem and captured King Jehoiakim and replaced him with his uncle Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar left only the poor people there. He also ordered to bring the captives who were from royal and noble descent among whom was Daniel and his three friends (Daniel: 1). He also took the treasures of the temple and the treasures of the king's house. He destroyed all the gold vessels that King Solomon had made for the Lord's altar,

*Who is Daniel?

and he captured the chiefs and the mighty men and all the craftsmen (2 Kings 24).

Isaiah (Isa 39 : 6 - 7), Jeremiah (Jer 25 : 11) and Micah (Mic 4 : 10) prophesied about the Babylonian captivity of the Kingdom of Judah. The prophecy of Isaiah came about 100 years before the captivity. On the other hand, Jeremiah prophesied that the period of captivity would be 70 years but the people didn't believe him.

And in spite of the warnings of Jeremiah, rebellion spread against Babylon. A false prophet named Hananiah announced that the exiles will return in two years but Jeremiah declared that Hananiah was a liar, and advised the exiles to continue their lives quietly in Babylon, because God had announced to him that their stay would be long in Babylon (Jeremiah 29). Zedekiah king of Judah

*Who is Daniel?

listened to Jeremiah's wise advice for some time but then he rebelled against Babylon so Nebuchadnezzar sent his army to besiege Jerusalem again. He seized Judah's fortified cities, one after the other. And Jerusalem fell after a siege lasting for 30 months in 586 B.C.

Daniel the Prophet and his book

Daniel was one of those exiled to Babylon and his prophecies lasted for 70 years from 605 - 535 B.C. He was contemporary of the Kingdoms of Babylon, Mede and Persia and he prophesied about the end times. Daniel's book is considered the last book of the big profits and consists of 14 chapters, (the last 2 chapters and part of the third chapter are part of the deuterocanonical

*Who is Daniel?

books and is called the completion of Daniel.

The book consists of a historical part (chapter 1-6): it includes the story of Daniel's captivity, his service in the Kingdom of Babylon, and staying faithful to his God in spite of all the hardships that he faced.

And a prophetic part (chapter 7-12): and it includes Daniel's visions concerning the end of times.

While studying this book we will notice the following

God is the Almighty who holds the whole of history. He builds His faithful believers wherever they are. He is glorified in a few faithful ones thus giving hope to tired souls.

*Who is Daniel?

It's the book of the Lord's friendship that is able to lift the believer's heart to the heavenly life even though he could be living in a land of exile.

it's the book where God offers His chosen beloved children knowledge about Him the knowledge about the love of God comes from suffering and perseverance.

This prophetic book allowed the estimation of the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, the date of his crucifixion and the events at the end of time.

- His book mentions the establishing of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the fierce opposition it will face from Satan especially at the end of time, and the anti-Christ and the second coming of Christ. He prophesied about the glorification of the saints, the judgment

*Who is Daniel?

awaiting the wicked and the desolation of the temple at the hands of Roman Titus.

- There are also prophecies concerning Jewish history, the four empires, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman. **Daniel, the prophet of end times** did not only see what was to come in the world, but also what was in eternity for “The Lord confides in those who fear Him”.

This is a book for all believers to discern their role in the life of the Church and towards humanity.



**Daniel in the
Exile**

The people of Israel were loved and guided by God through many centuries. God was preparing His plan for the salvation of mankind through them, for from them was coming the Savior who was going to crush the serpent's heel. They needed special preparation, for they were going to be the rock and the yeast, proclaiming salvation to all humanity.

The people of Israel went astray but God's long-suffering and patience sent them many messages of love and repentance. They were stiff-necked and stubborn, so He sent them prophets to warn them about the coming punishment.

*Daniel in The Exile

They would sometimes return to God, only to wander away again and go back to their wicked ways.

The fall and captivity and exile of the northern kingdom, Israel at the hands of the Assyrians should have been the loudest bell warning its sister, Judah from the coming danger at the hands of the Babylonians. They did not repent, thinking that God would never allow such a fate to His chosen people. The people continued in their sinful ways and we read about Jeremiah the prophet weeping that his tears flowed like rivers for tens of years. All this to no avail and the fall occurred over three stages, the first of those during the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, when our story of the beloved Daniel begins.

The First Exile

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it .And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles. young men in whom [there was] no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who [had] ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's

delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of [that time] they might serve before the king" (Dan 1:1 - 5)

At that time the kingdom of Judah was subjugated to Babylon's King and Nebuchadnezzar was not yet the official ruler of the Babylonians, but he had been the army's leader and he ruled with his father. When Jehoiakim King of Judah announced his rebellion against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar decided to besiege Jerusalem to quell the revolution in its beginning. So, he went with his great army and besieged Jerusalem, took captive into exile some of the Jews and took the altar's vessels from the temple of God. This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy when he told King Hezekiah:

"Behold, the days are coming when all that [is] in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord. And they shall take away [some] of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa 39 : 6 - 7)

There is no doubt that there were plenty of tears and groans as those exiled cast a last look on their beautiful city, Jerusalem, before being taken away to an unknown future in a pagan country. This was the land of the Chaldeans from where their grandfather Abraham had been called out 14 centuries earlier, in order to inherit the Promised Land. They were now forced to return to it!

Those exiled had different reactions. Some were cross with God!

*Daniel in The Exile

There are those who are cross with God because He allows such trials. They reason “if God forsakes us and allows trials to occur why should we hold fast to Him and pray?” While others allow their relationship with God to grow cold as they wait for the results of the incidents.

Very few people like Daniel and his companions, discover that what happened to them was the chastisement of a loving Father who has hopes for His children.

During the long journey to exile, Daniel must have wondered what sort of future awaited him. He held fast to the Lord as his rock, as he saw all buildings around him destroyed and collapsing. Indeed they were all built on sand! The nation, the royal family they belong to, Jerusalem with its temples and palaces ...

*Daniel in The Exile

all gone. Only the Rock of ages stays unchanged, yesterday, today and forever.

Upon arrival in the land of exile, any perplexing about the future was soon dispelled. The King had ordered the chief of his court officials to choose the best amongst the exiled nobles from king's He was ordered to teach them the Chaldean (Babylonian) language and literature, and they were to eat from the royal palace kitchen, a great honor to have been bestowed. The King himself was to test them after three years. Nebuchadnezzar's aim was to reprogram the minds of the youths, altering their real identity and changing their allegiance from their nation to King Nebuchadnezzar. Through a life of luxury he would be assured that there would be no rebellion against him. This is similar to the devil's plan with God's

*Daniel in The Exile

children, he wants to take them captive away from their nation and throw them in a strange world. He gives them a dialogue different from what they had learnt from their spiritual fathers, and their eyes are dazzled by worldly pleasures and luxuries forgetting their roots and dissolving amidst a new world.

The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand!
(Dan 1:2)

A strange sentence that we might think we misunderstood ...

Did God deliver His people to Nebuchadnezzar's hands? Does He forsake his chosen ones?

This is specially written to teach us that God might lift His hands leaving His people to be disciplined for their many sins. Chastisement is not an act of revenge

*Daniel in The Exile

but a sign of God's love to souls where He sees hope in their salvation.

Let us be vigilant and not become careless depending on God's protection, for in spite of His patience and forbearance, He sometimes has to lift His hands (protection) from us and leave us in the devil's hands longing to fill our stomach with the pods that the pigs eat until we repent and return back to Him from all our hearts.

Daniel and his companions

"Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel [the name] Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego" (Dan 1 : 6 - 7)

*Daniel in The Exile

Nebuchadnezzar would have succeeded in his plan but for the presence of a few faithful youths, who despite their young age (14-18 years) did not give in. They were Daniel and his three fellow companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. In order to further undermine their identity, the chief of court officials gave them new names that don't relate to their Lord because their old names were related to Jehovah.

- **Daniel “God the judge”** ... became Belteshazzar (meaning the god baal is the protector)
- **Hananiah “God the compassionate”** ... became Shadrach (Rakh- god of the sun – strengthens)

- **Mishael “who is like God”** ... became Meshach (who is like akh god- the god of beauty)
- **Azariah “God helps”** ... became Abednego (the slave of nagho - god of knowledge)

And if we look at the meaning of the names in this order we will find **“although God is the judge but He is also compassionate, who is like Him in His help”**. But the devil, represented by Nebuchadnezzar wanted to erase the names that witness to God and substitute them with other names that have pagan significance. But this substitution didn't succeed in erasing God's name from the hearts and minds of Daniel and his companions, for God's love was engraved inside them, and neither temptations nor tribulations could change it.

The remnant who fear God

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who [are] your age? Then you would endanger my head before the kinganiel" (Dan 1 : 8 - 10)

When tribulations storm people's lives, responses differ. Some try their utmost to mix in the new society, forgetting the past; while others set their sight on God not trying any new venture

*Daniel in The Exile

before making sure that the work pleased God and agreed with His will.

Hundreds of the exiles changed their names and were pleased to eat from the royal food and wine not raising any objections for Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty tyrant who beheaded whoever thought of disobeying him.

The Holy Bible was very accurate in emphasizing the distinction between Daniel and his companions on the one hand and the rest of the captive exiles on the other hand. So, we find that the speech started with the word **“But Daniel”**, as if Daniel doesn’t belong to those exiles, and from here the distinction occurs, for Daniel had decided not to get defiled by the King’s food (food slaughtered to idols is considered defiled under Jewish law). It might also contain

*Daniel in The Exile

pork or camel meat both the Law of Moses forbade. Daniel didn't excuse himself – and it would be easy – but with courage and boldness decided to present his objection to the responsible chief official, so, he appealed to him very politely asking him not to be defiled with this food.

Although the first response of the chief official was refusal, God was working invisibly and gave Daniel grace in the eyes of the chief official who didn't rebuke him but explained to him gently that the matter is more serious than this. He didn't dare to disobey the king for fear of death if the king found Daniel and his companions looking thinner or worse than the rest of the exiles. Daniel realized that his request was not under the authority of

*Daniel in The Exile

the chief official, but being faithful and serious in his desire, did not give up.

But Daniel ... resolved ... (Daniel 1:8)

What did you resolve your heart young man?

How did you dare to think of objecting? What love drove you to this?

Did your love for your Lord exceed your love for your life? Or your trust in Him was unlimited?

Why didn't you follow the others and forget your God and His laws, for you are an exile in a strange land and in the middle of strange gods? Don't you ever close your eyes forgetting Jerusalem and what you learned there?

No doubt Daniel and the 3 youths were subjected to a lot of sarcasm from

*Daniel in The Exile

their friends due to their 'narrow minds' and holding on to the teaching they considered old fashioned. Sarcasm is very cruel in this stage in a youth's life traumatizing young hearts. Daniel's situation puts to shame all who create excuses to live with no control calling it freedom and leaving the Lord's commandments and defiling the mind and heart with unsuitable things to and being deceived by calling it culture and modernity.

When the word **"But"** is mentioned in the Holy Bible the reader has to stop and compare between what preceded the word **"But"** and what followed it. Examine yourself are you with the many who are wrong or with the few who are holding on to the truth.

Some examples: “You have heard that it was said ... **But** I tell you ... **When** you fast ... and when you pray ... so when you give to the needy ... **But** you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness ... **But** as for you, know all about my teaching, my way of life ... **But** you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardships ... **You** must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

No Going back or giving in

"So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of

the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, [so] deal with your servants. So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables" (Dan 1 : 11 - 16)

Love doesn't make up excuses but creates ways to fulfill the impossible. Daniel's love for the Lord did not accept defeat; he did not give up on the chief official's change of mind. He tried again with the steward appointed by the chief official. He suggested a test for ten days in which they would eat vegetables and only drink water.

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God worked in the heart of the guard who consented to the suggestion which seemed illogical for the guard must have been surprised by the courage of those young men who chose to leave the king's banquet and eat legumes and abandon wine to drink water, and imagine that they would be healthier than others ... He must have thought that it was better to prove them wrong after a few days and thus win their trust and assistance, for they were polite youths, especially the one named Daniel who had found grace in his eyes with his gentle words, so he couldn't refuse his request.

After ten days a miracle happened, and the guard couldn't believe his eyes. Who would believe that someone eating legumes would be better nourishment than eating royal food? It was a miracle by

*Daniel in The Exile

all standards for ten days are not enough to show the difference, but God allowed this to happen because of the faithfulness of His servants who, for the love of God and His commandments, sacrificed the physical pleasures.

As the experiment had succeeded, the guard could no longer object. He would place the royal food in front of them not to draw attention and later bring legumes and remove the royal delicacies.

Are you different?!

Boats sail very easily when they sail with the wind, but it is much harder to sail against the wind, needing effort and experience. It's customary to go with the flow to avoid pain. We live in the world but we are no of it. By nature we are different, but the devil tries hard to make

*Daniel in The Exile

us forget this difference and let us behave like other people from the world persuading us that we have to be like others. Sadly his plan has succeeded with many and persuaded them that the majority must have the right opinion, so, why go against the flow?

In spite of this, there are still a few faithful to their God like Daniel and his companions, who were candles shining in the middle of the darkness of exile ... would we be of those faithful ones?!

Or are we those who conform and behave like the majority so not to be different. A live fish swims against the flow, but dead fish is always carried by the flow and taken wherever it goes.

Is vegetarian food really better for health?

Doctors might differ in answering this question, but what concerns us here is the spiritual dimension in the story. Those who obey God and seek to please Him find that He is able to keep them healthy even in a few days.

As Christians we hear this question in every fast and we refer to what happened with Daniel in three whole years – not 55 or 43 days. For Daniel it was not about a fast but rather keeping himself from being defiled. Both a fast and what Daniel did are offerings of love to God, where the body is considered as a sacrifice.

Why did God consider some food unclean but later permitted it?

Leviticus chapter 11 is full of details about the kinds of food that the Jewish law considered unclean. It includes animals, birds and fish. Jews who feared God obeyed this law very precisely, with some of them preferring to die as martyrs rather than eat pork meat and break God's commandment (as we read in 2 Maccabees 6).

What was the aim from these commandments? And what is the benefit to the one who obeys it? If this food is harmful to health, why did God permit it again as we read about St. Peter's vision in (Acts 10 : 11 - 16).

To answer this question let's consider the practice in some schools

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where the school orders the pupils to wear a certain uniform with certain colors. This keeps it tidy, and although other colors are not 'evil' and not 'immoral', this uniform reminds the pupils that they are ambassadors for their schools accepting to its traditions and values, and after a while the pupils grow and move to university and later life where they could wear whatever they wish from colors after they had learned that their submission as children to school uniforms was a temporary stage which fulfilled its aim. They can now teach others about the ethos and values of their school without the obligation of wearing a uniform. Maybe that example can serve as a modest means to clarify God's wisdom in His commandments regarding clean and unclean food that was later changed in the New Testament.

God's reward

"As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom [and] understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians [and] astrologers who [were] in all his realm. Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus" (Dan 1: 17 - 21)

God saw the faithfulness of those four youths despite all the hindrances,

*Daniel in The Exile

and how they were not just striving in their spiritual life, but also in their studied so He rewarded them and gave them knowledge and wisdom in all subjects. Their success demonstrates how God's grace crowns a faithful servant's strive.

At the end of three years all the students stood before the king to be tested by him. The king was amazed by Daniel and his companions' wisdom for he found them **ten times** better than their compatriots. They had asked the guard to test them for **ten days** and in return God gave them wisdom ten times more than the others. Praise be to You, O God, for You said "**Those who honor me I will honor**" (1Sam2:30) and Your promises don't change neither in place nor time.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

"Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was [so] troubled that his sleep left him. Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream". Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation". The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap". However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards,

and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation" (Dan 2 : 1 - 6)

Nebuchadnezzar, like other kings at that time, believed in magicians and astrologers, and they had a great rank. One night the king had a dream that bothered him and kept him awake. At dawn, he ordered all the magicians and sorcerers and astrologers to come before him.

The king asked for the impossible: they were to tell him his dream and its interpretation as well! He was not going to relate the dream to them, which was unheard of before. He warned them that he was going to kill them if they failed but reward them greatly if they succeeded.

The Magician's objection

"They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation". The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm. If you do not make known the dream to me, [there is only] one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation". The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has [ever] asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. [It is] a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except

the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" (Dan 2 : 7 - 11)

Students are used to facing some difficult questions in exams from time to time. In no nightmare though, would they dream that an examiner would ask them to know the question that he wanted and they would then have to answer it as well! The time given to answer is not long and the punishment is not failure but execution!! In vain the magicians asked the king to tell them the dream to interpret it but he answered them harshly and accused them of trying to buy time to invent lies. He was adamant which terrified the magicians for they knew how violent and stubborn he was, but God used his stubbornness and pride to be glorified in His saints, Daniel and his companions.

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The magicians confessed their failure as they were faced with a demand which had never happened before: *‘what the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men’* Did they believe in invisible gods with special powers?

Unknowingly ,they had proclaimed what most of us believe , for we are God’s people and our God doesn’t live in heaven but with human beings, born in a manger , growing up as any child and working as a carpenter and share our happiness and sadness. A grace that distinguishes us ... Our Lord living amongst us, dwelling in our hearts and being united with us in the sacrament of communion.

Daniel asks for time

"For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise *men*; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill *them*. Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise *men* of Babylon; he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel. So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time that he might tell the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that

Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise *men* of Babylon." (Dan 2 : 12 - 18)

The king was furious and ordered the execution of his decree immediately. Arioch the commander of the king's guard was commissioned to exterminate all the wise men of Babylon! Arioch was petrified seeing the king's fury and did not dare to discuss with him or seek any clemency. At the same time how could he kill all Babylon's wise men without any guilt? Yet he knew that any delay meant he was to pay with his own life, for the king was unforgiving and unchangeable. Thus Arioch was forced to go to prepare the list for execution which included Daniel and his companions!

Indeed the execution of some of the wise men started and when Daniel and

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his companions' turn came, he asked Arioch to give him some time. God gave Daniel grace in the eyes of Arioch who did not insist on immediate execution, as he did with the previous ones, but accepted his negotiations. Maybe Arioch knew that Daniel would fail as the others but wanted to appease his conscience.

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." (Prov 21 : 1) ... Nebuchadnezzar's fury and anger was changed to reason and calm during his meeting with Daniel. He might have remembered that he was one of the excellent ones that he had examined. He agreed to give him the time that he asked for. Arioch must have wondered at the sudden change that had occurred to the

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king who gave time to Daniel and denied it to others!

It is equally amazing how Daniel trusted that he would know the dream and its interpretation! This was trust in the Lord and not in his own wisdom; the trust that led him to refuse the royal food and ask for ten days to prove his request.

He quickly sought his three companions and asked them to join him in an urgent prayer meeting, asking for the Lord's mercy to save them from perishing. The four knelt praying fervently, asking the Almighty God to reveal the dream and its interpretation, lest they perish.

The power and effectiveness of prayer

This situation is repeated many times through the history of our Coptic Orthodox Church. The church faced many

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troubles and tribulations emerging from each one, unscathed through the power of prayer.

One such situation happened at the end of the eighth century during the reign of one of the Abbasid Caliphate when an unjust governor ruled Egypt. He ordered the destruction of churches and sent his officers with strict orders from the caliph. The soldiers went round destroying as decreed until they reached St. Mary's Church in Atrib (near Banha). The priest there cried to God in prayer, through the intercessions of St. Mary. He then approached the governor and asked for a reprieve of three days by which time he was going to get another decree from the caliph in Baghdad to stop the destruction of churches. The governing prince must have thought it a joke as the trip between

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Egypt and Baghdad would take two months, so reluctantly he agreed to the delay, wondering at the priest's certain madness.

In Baghdad, while the Caliph was asleep, a heavenly light shone in front of him, waking him up. He was frightened to see St. Mary who she told him: "I am Mary the mother of Jesus whose churches you have ordered to be destroyed. How can you sleep calmly, while Christians are in hardship because of you?" Trembling, the Caliph asked her what she wanted him to do. "Write a decree immediately in your handwriting and seal it with your stamp and send it to Atrib today, to stop the destruction of the churches and assault on Christians."

The Caliph asked her how it would get to Egypt and Atrib within the day.

St. Mary confirmed that he had to write the decree and seal it and with God's grace it was going to be delivered that day. Frightened, the Caliph obeyed. Suddenly a bird flew in, took the letter in its beak and flew all the way to the priest in Atrib, Egypt.

The next day, at the appointed time, the governor came with his soldiers, armed and ready to destroy the church. When he was given the sealed decree he could not believe it and accused the priest of deceit. He was confused seeing the Caliph's seal but the priest explained to him that this was not the work of a mere man but St. Mary who intercedes on our behalf. The governor decided to travel to Baghdad to see the Caliph personally and ascertain the veracity of the message.

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The governor arrived in Baghdad and was admitted to the presence of the Caliph. They exchanged stories and as they discovered the truth, the Caliph ordered a magnificent church to be built dedicated to St. Mary. It was to be grander than any place of worship around it. And so it was built.

Another miracle is documented and happened at the end of the tenth century during the reign of the Al Muizz Lideenillah, the Fatimid Caliph in Egypt. It was the moving of the Mokattem Mountain in response to the Caliph's threat to exterminate all Copts. The Caliph had asked Pope Abram Ibn Zaraa, pope of Alexandria to fulfill what was said in the bible regarding moving mountains if one had faith. After the whole community fasting and praying for 3 days, St. Mary

directed the pope to Simon the Tanner, through whom the miracle happened and the mountain was moved.

Deep Gratitude Prayer

"Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what [is] in the darkness, And light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand." (Dan 2 : 19 - 23)

Heaven answered, and God revealed to Daniel the dream and its interpretation. He blessed God with gratitude, before going to meet the king to reveal the mystery.

Daniel asks to enter to the King

"Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise [men] of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise [men] of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation. Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation". The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name [was] Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation? Daniel

answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise [men,] the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: "As for you, O king, thoughts came [to] your [mind while] on your bed, [about] what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. "But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for [our] sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart." (Dan 2 : 24 - 30)

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After thanking God, Daniel went to Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, and with courage and trust asked him not to execute Babylon's wise men. For him it was very important to save his friends the wise men from an unjust decree. He also requested to meet the king as soon as possible.

Did Arioch wonder if Daniel had forgotten who he was to stop the king's decree? Was Arioch certain that Daniel had found the answer?

Arioch immediately went to the king to tell him that there was a man from Judah's exile who could tell the king the dream and its interpretation. The king doubted Daniel's ability but Daniel did not seem concerned to quickly recount the dream. He considered it an opportunity to

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preach to the pagan king about His true God who alone knew all the mysteries.

With true humility Daniel gave God the glory, denying that it was his wisdom or righteousness that marked him from others but rather the grace of God that had allowed him to know what was to happen in the future.

Do you witness to your God?

Daniel was a captive exiled in a strange land amidst hard circumstances, having his whole identity and name changed to force him to forget his God. Yet Daniel never forgot, and when the opportunity came he took it and witnessed to his God telling the pagan king about the Almighty God in heaven. Many miss opportunities to witness, either because they are embarrassed and

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ashamed or avoiding the responsibility. Do we learn from him?

Daniel reveals the dream

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor [was] excellent, stood before you; and its form [was] awesome.



This image's head [was] of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze. Its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried

them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This [is] the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king." (Dan 2 : 31 - 36)

Daniel told the king his dream. He had seen a large statue. The top was made of very expensive and precious elements, the head was pure gold. The lower parts were made of less valuable materials: the chest and the arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze and its legs of iron mixed with clay at the feet. Suddenly a great rock, not carved by hands, appeared and struck the statue at the feet and the whole statue was smashed and the rock became like a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. And Daniel did not wait for the king's comments on his words but started interpreting the dream.

Interpreting the dream

"You, O king, [are] a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given [them] into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all -- you [are] this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, [that kingdom] will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And [as]

the toes of the feet [were] partly of iron and partly of clay, [so] the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."
(Dan 2 : 37 - 45)

Daniel started interpreting the dream which related to the kingdoms and their succession, and it described four kingdoms:

- **The Babylonian Kingdom:** and it is represented in the head of the gold statue, it ruled Babylon in year 625 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar's father reigned, and Babylon ruled the world during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. God gave into his hands all the kingdoms and gave him glory and honor that was not given to any king before.
- **The kingdom of Medes and Persia:** and it is represented in the silver chest and arms and. Cyrus the Persian came in year 538 B.C. and he conquered the Babylonian Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar During the time of Persians the return of the Jewish exiles

started. But the Persian Kingdom was not as strong as the Babylonian.

- **The Greek Kingdom:** The Kingdom of Persia lasted for about two centuries, until the Great Alexander conquered it in year 331 B.C. and it is represented in the bronze belly and thighs. Alexander would rise quickly in a few years to rule the world but he will die fast and his kingdom will be distributed among his four leaders.
- **The Roman Kingdom:** and it is represented by the legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. The Roman Kingdom was cruel as iron, it broke and destroyed all the previous kingdoms and seized the Kingdom from the Greeks in year 168 B.C. and ruled the world. The Romans had their process of colonization, so they didn't

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destroy the countries or take captives from people but they were present in all the countries they colonized, as they had a Roman garrison in every country. They didn't mix with the natives of the country as iron and clay don't mix.

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- The Gold Head = the Babylonian Kingdom 606-539 B.C.
- The chest and silver arms= Mede & Persian Kingdom 539-331 B.C.
- The Belly & Bronze thighs = Greek Kingdom 331-146 B.C.
- The Iron legs, and feet of iron and clay = Roman Empire, from 146 B.C. until after Christ.
- The stone not cut by hands = Jesus Christ born without human seed, destroys all kingdoms and establishes a never-ending kingdom = The Church.



NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM AND THE SUCCESSION OF KINGDOMS

And finally in the time of the Romans a Rock, not cut by human hands, appeared (that symbolizes Jesus Christ and His miraculous birth without any human seed) and the rock struck the statue at its feet and crushed it, and the rock became a huge mountain, and this mountain is the never-ending Kingdom of Christ (The Church). The arch-angel Gabriel had indicated this in his announcement to St. Mary when he told her **"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."** (Luke 1:31-33)

As for the mountain that filled the whole earth, it is the spread of the Christianity in the whole world. This

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Kingdom is never ending and the gates of hell won't vanquish it.

Daniel explained to the king that God was letting the king know what would happen in the future. He confirmed that it was the truth and that it would all come to pass as he mentioned.

The King acknowledges Daniel's Lord

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God [is] the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret. Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise [men] of

Babylon. Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel [sat] in the gate of the king" (Dan 2 : 46 - 49)

The mighty emperor, in front of whom all princes and kings fell prostrate, had no choice but to fall prostrate before Daniel, in a scene that amazed everyone present.

It is truly amazing that the king who was ready to kill all the wise men in his I fury, humbled himself and knelt down before Daniel acknowledging that his God was the God of gods and the Lord of Kings. Sadly, in spite of this complete acknowledgement, he still considered Him "Daniel's God" and not his own God! This is true today with many people, they acknowledge God's power that does

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miracles and reveals secrets without moving to the next step, like that taken by Saul of Tarsus and so became the greatest evangelist.

And the king rewarded Daniel and elevated his position to the equivalent of prime minister. In his success, Daniel did not forget his friends the 3 youths and asked the king to give them administrative positions in the government in the province of Babylon.

This dream and its interpretation remind us of the famous dreamer, Joseph the righteous Joseph, for there are many resemblances:

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Joseph the righteous	Daniel
He was a slave in Egypt, and Pharaoh changed his name to Zaphenath-Paneah.	He was an exile in Babylon. And changed his name to Belteshazzar.
He served in Potiphar's house.	He served in the palace of the King of Babylon.
He was faithful to his God and did not sin with his master's wife Potiphar.	He was faithful to his God and refused to defile himself with the royal food and wine.
He stood before Pharaoh and interpreted his dream.	He stood before Nebuchadnezzar and revealed his dream and its interpretation.

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Joseph the righteous	Daniel
He saved the world from starvation.	He saved the wise men of Babylon from death.
Pharaoh appointed him Prime Minister.	Nebuchadnezzar appointed him Prime Minister.



**The Three Youths in the
Blazing Furnace**

The previous chapter ended with the king's acknowledgement of the greatness of Daniel's God with no other god being equal to Him. We would have expected Nebuchadnezzar to forsake his pride after what happened. Alas, he did not change. He might have thought about the dream and asked himself what would make the great Babylonian empire weaken. He might have thought that the reason was that the empire was made up of many nations that did not mix due to the different traditions, customs and religions.

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Although he had imposed the Chaldean language on all those nations, the different religions hindered his plans of unifying the nations under his Babylonian rule, making them one homogenous nation.

Could the answer to his problem be in the dream, a dazzling statue of gold that no other religion of any other nation could have offered to the people? The whole statue was to be of gold unrivalled by any other god's statue, and everyone in the empire had to prostrate themselves to it.

Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten what God had done and instead of gratitude and changing his ways, he remained as stubborn and as arrogant and proud as he always was.

It is believed that the incidents of this part took place after many years of

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the captivity and exile of Daniel and his companions which took place in year 605 B.C. This was followed by another exile of Judah in year 597 B.C. than the third and final wave of exile in which Jerusalem and its temple were completely destroyed in year 586 B.C. Thus all the hopes of the exiled Jews to return Jerusalem were dashed, and they remembered Jeremiah's prophecies **"For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place."** (Jer 29 : 10). They knew that most of them would not live long enough to see Jerusalem again and they would have to spend the rest of their lives in exile and live as faithful witnesses to their God so that He would fulfill His promise of their return.

The Golden Statue

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height [was] sixty cubits [and] its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. And King Nebuchadnezzar sent [word] to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O

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peoples, nations, and languages. [that] at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, [and] psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, [and] lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down [and] worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (Dan 3 : 1 - 7)

An awesome scene! A huge statue of shining gold, 30 meters high as tall as a 10 storey building!! How much it would have cost is beyond our imagination for we weigh gold in grams and not in tons as this would have been!

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No doubt preparing it would have taken a long time. News about the inauguration and celebrations were sent all across the empire, with all the dignitaries invited to attend. There were representatives of all the nations of the empire all coming to prostrate themselves in an act of worship to the statue and the king. It was to be an announcement of their allegiance to the king and a new religion. All those attending had no choice but to bow down and worship for the king's requests were sacred and could not be disobeyed.

An invitation was directed to the three youths, probably aged thirty at the time and occupying high positions, envied by others in Babylon.

We are not sure why the invitation was not directed to Daniel? Was he in a

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mission far from the capital? Could the king have recognized that Daniel was the spiritual leader for the Jews and he won't worship anyone except His God, and kept him far from the inauguration celebrations?

But Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael must have prayed together for long and then decided to accept the king's invitation, but they not worship or bow to anything other than God.

If the situation passed peacefully then they would have avoided any bloodshed due to offending the king with declining the invitation. If on the other hand he forced them to prostrate than it would be their chance to testify to their God even through their martyrdom. They didn't think how they would answer the king. They felt God saying *"For it will not*

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be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”.

The reflection of the sun on the golden statue was enough to dazzle the most serious mind, and in the presence of most of the dignitaries of the empire, the celebrations began. A herald explained what they had to do. Everyone had to bow and worship in front of the statue at the sound of music. This was out of loyalty and devotion to the king.

Under normal circumstances, disobedience to the king's decrees meant execution; disobeying to worship the golden statue and spoiling the grand celebrations was going to be punished by public burning in a fiery furnace, to be made an example of in front of all present.

The music blasted, signaling the time to prostrate in front of the new god,

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the golden statue. In the middle of the crowd, three heads did not bow down, when all others fell down bowing. Three heads remained raised high as they refused to worship an earthly god. Their loyalty was to their God..

They left Jerusalem from many years ago and the holy city and its altar were burnt down, but they never forgot that the first commandment was **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."** (Exod 20:2-3)

Their fathers might have prostrated themselves to the Baal and idols many times, and now they were paying the price by being exiled and taken into captivity. So they decided not to repeat the mistake of their fathers.

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The reader might have noticed the repetition of number six and its doubles. Number six is a symbol of evil and imperfection. The width of the statue was 6 cubits and its height 60 and they used 6 musical instruments. Even the beast that comes in the end of the times is symbolized by number 666 (Rev 13).

The envious accusers

"Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever.! You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, [and] psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are

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certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan 3 : 8 - 12)

Many of those bowing down were envious of the high positions the three youths had achieved. This gave them a chance to get rid of them by accusing them in front of the king. They reminded the king of his decree and that not obeying was a direct affront to the king. They also pretended it was out of zeal for the new god. Nebuchadnezzar did not need anyone to fuel his anger. He quickly passed judgment on them. Those same men who accused the youths were some of those whom Daniel and the youths had saved when the king had his dream but their

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envy blinded them and they were waiting for the opportunity to get rid of them.

The king's anger

"Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "[Is it] true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, [that] you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up.? Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, [and] psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, [good!] But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who [is] the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Dan 3 : 13 - 15)

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The king was fuming with anger. Normally he didn't care about burning those who disobeyed him without a trial, but he gave them a chance to show others how they surrendered and bowed down to his god and that there was no one on earth daring to oppose him.

In his arrogance and pride, Nebuchadnezzar forgot who he was and challenged God saying: **"And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"** What arrogant words from a conceited man who was soon going to find the answer and regret his challenge for the rest of his life.

Accepting the competition

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that [is the case,] our God whom we serve is able to

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deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver [us] from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan 3: 16 - 18)

The men were not in a situation where they could compromise and go for the middle ground. They were at crossroads: either to worship the idol and lose their eternity, or refuse to bow down and be thrown into the fire and be burned to death.

From the days of their youth they had trained their bodies by fasting and not being defiled by the unclean royal food and drink. They had grown up hearing about Abraham, who out of obedience to God put his only son on the altar to slay him in obedience to God. They also knew

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about Joseph who refused to obey his master's wife and preferred to be thrown in prison than to sin and do evil in the eyes of God. The three youths knew that the fiery furnace would have power over their bodies for a short while, but there was an eternal fire that had power over bodies and souls, not just for a few hours but for eternity. They were not afraid of what was to befall them; in fact they wanted to be martyrs and witnesses for the One who loved them and whom they loved. They wanted to witness to him not just in their generation but throughout the ages and to all generations.

That's how they managed to face the king with trust and courage, addressing him without his title! **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer**

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you in this matter". That alone would have been enough to get them executed!

When we consider their words "**Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us**" we realize that they were not sure that God would deliver them from the fiery furnace! But that did not change their decision; so if He saved them, God's name would be glorified, and if He allowed them to die they will accept it happily. Worshiping the statue was not an option.

They refused to bow down although God didn't promise to save them from the fire! He is their God in time of happiness and distress, in prosperity and adversity; they thank God in all conditions in good times as well as in tribulations. *"O God teach me how to accept everything from your hand without differentiating between good and evil, the sweet and the*

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bitter, what makes us happy and what depresses us. And to thank you on every condition because whatever you do to me can only be good”.

In the middle of fiery furnace

"Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who [were] in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, [and] cast [them] into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their [other] garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly

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hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." (Dan 3 : 19 - 23)

The arrogant king was incandescent! Who are those who have dared to disobey his commandments? Those Jewish exiles have to be made an example of so others obeyed blindly.

He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times as hot as the regular heat. The strongest soldiers were brought in to bind the three men and to throw them into the fiery furnace. As the furnace door was opened and the men thrown in loud screams were heard. They were the screams of the soldiers who had thrown them in, for so powerful was the fire that

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its heat killed those who came near in order to cast the men. We can only guess how hot it must have been inside the furnace!.

The fourth is like the Son of God

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?", They answered and said to the king, "True, O king.", "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.", Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the

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fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them."

(Dan 3 : 24 - 27)

The king and the people must have waited to hear the screams of the three men, but there was no scream coming out of the furnace. The king drew close to see what was happening and was astonished to find them walking in the middle of the furnace. Looking again he discovered that there were four figures inside the furnace and not only the three he had ordered to be burnt alive. The appearance of the fourth man baffled him for he was very bright and looked like the Son of God.

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We don't know why the king chose this word specially "Son of God" to describe what he saw! Did the Spirit of God reveal to him the secret of this strange man!



Nebuchadnezzar came closer to the door of the furnace and called on the men. The men came out without a single hair being singed and not even smelling of fire! Only what bind them was gone. Only three men came out of the furnace. For them the fiery furnace was not a symbol of death but of new life gained

On the cross, the Son of God changed a terrifying means of execution into the gateway to a new life to all those

*The Three Youths in the Blazing Furnace

who believe in Him. Their chains and bonds of sin would fall and be broken, setting him free. The same happened for the three youths when the Son of God was with them in the fiery furnace, showing us what was to happen a few centuries later.

The fire burnt their chains only without hurting them; our trials burn the chains of sin leaving us free. **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, and they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you"** (Isa 43 : 2)

Kinds of Trials

We complain and grumble when faced by trials, asking why God allows His children to go through trials and not prevent them. The Bible and the history of

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the Church is full of stories of trials and tribulations facing the children of God ...

Trials come for many reasons; the two commonest reasons are for purification and advancement in spiritual life ...

- **Purification and refinement:** Often God finds that one of His children has a sin in his life that he is a slave to and that is leading him away. Trials bring us closer to God for the furnace did not hurt the youths but cut them loose from the chains. When God allows His children to pass through trials it is to free their souls from the chains of sin.
- **Advancement in spiritual life:** To move to a higher grade we sit exams and tests. Likewise, God often allows His children to go through tests and

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tribulations in order to move forward in their spiritual lives. Abraham's faith was tested when God asked him to kill his son Isaac. The Canaanite woman was praised for her faith when she persisted after Jesus told her that it was not right to give the bread of the children to the dogs.

Should we ask God for a miracle for all our problems?

Of course we have the right to ask for a miracle from Almighty God and we persevere in prayer for it to happen. In spite of the many miracles we see and hear about they are still the exception and not the rule.

The person whose faith is based on the occurrence of a miracle will be

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frustrated. He might even lose his faith when no miracle happens.

We trust that the One who gave His only Son on the cross does not need to prove His love for us by more miracles. We arm ourselves with Saint Paul's words: **"For if we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's"** (Rom 14 : 8) Accordingly, whether we are ill or healthy, suffering injustice or treated fairly, persecuted or honored, we are always the Lord's.

God chose to deliver those men but we should remember the many others who gave up their lives and were not saved by miracles and became martyrs like St. Polycarpus the bishop of Smyrna, who was allowed to be martyred by being burnt alive when he was an old man. This

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great martyr witnessed to God before his martyrdom: “for 86 years I have served Christ and He has never harmed me, how can I betray Him now?!” and went into the fire with courage.

Whatever the reason for the trials and tribulations, they could be the only chance for us to meet with God. Those three youths had known God for many years but they only met Him face to face in the furnace. If we were to ask them: ‘Would you have chosen to go through this trial to start off?’ their definite answer would be: ‘How could we choose to miss the most glorious moment of our lives? For life is but a moment and the most precious moment was walking in the fiery furnace with the Son of God!’

Likewise if you are in the midst of the fiery furnace trust your God who says:

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“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place." (Isa 43 : 1 - 3)

No doubt you have the right to ask God to lift the trial, but you will be more mature spiritually if you accept it with thanksgiving asking Him to grant you the grace to bear it in order to obtain its blessing, and tell Him: “I am not asking for a lighter burden but for stronger shoulders”.

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Nebuchadnezzar glorifies the God of the three youths

"Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon" (Dan 3 : 28 - 30)

Once again the king who threatened saying **"And who is the Lord**

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who will deliver you from my hands?" becomes the one testifying and giving glory to God. We saw his change of heart when Daniel told him the dream and its interpretation, when he proclaimed: "**Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets**" (Dan 2 : 47)

But Nebuchadnezzar forgot and went back to his arrogant ways until God showed him His power again with the three youths, so he blessed the God who delivered His servants who had preferred to die rather than worship other gods.

The king admitted that: "**there is no other God who can deliver like this**".

Moreover, he issued a decree that whoever spoke against their God would be killed and his house burnt down.

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He also rewarded the three men and gave them high positions in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar is just one of a long line of tyrants who occasionally threaten believers with the worst punishments than is forced to admit that *there is no other God who can deliver like this.*

Azariah's prayer

This is read on the Night of Apocalypse (night before Bright Saturday) (Abou Ghalamsis). It is called Apocalypse because the whole of the book of Revelation is read. Many other prayers are read as well including this prayer. It indicates the shift from death to life, for they were considered dead but were raised through the power of God. This

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prayer is part of the deuterocanonical books, the completion of Daniel.

"And they walked about in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord.. Then Azariah stood and offered this prayer; in the midst of the fire he opened his mouth and said.: Blessed art thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and worthy of praise; and thy name is glorified forever. For thou art just in all that thou hast done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right, and all thy judgments are truth. Thou hast executed true judgments in all that thou hast brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our fathers, for in truth and justice thou hast brought all this upon us because of our sins. For we have sinfully and lawlessly departed from thee, and have sinned in all things and have not obeyed thy commandments. we have not observed them or done them, as thou

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thou hast commanded us that it might go well with us. So all that thou hast brought upon us, and all that thou hast done to us, thou hast done in true judgment. Thou hast given us into the hands of lawless enemies, most hateful rebels, and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world. And now we cannot open our mouths; shame and disgrace have befallen thy servants and worshipers. For thy name's sake do not give us up utterly, and do not break thy covenant. And do not withdraw thy mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham thy beloved and for the sake of Isaac thy servant and Israel thy holy one. to whom thou didst promise to make their descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the shore of the sea. For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any nation, and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins. And at this time there is no

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prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before thee or to find mercy. Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls, and with tens of thousands of fat lambs. such may our sacrifice be in thy sight this day, and may we wholly follow thee, for there will be no shame for those who trust in thee. And now with all our heart we follow thee, we fear thee and seek thy face. Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in thy forbearance and in thy abundant mercy. Deliver us in accordance with thy marvelous works, and give glory to thy name, O Lord! Let all who do harm to thy servants be put to shame. let them be disgraced and deprived of all power and dominion, and let their strength be broken. Let them know that thou art the

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Lord, the only God, glorious over the whole world. Now the king's servants who threw them in did not cease feeding the furnace fires with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brush. And the flame streamed out above the furnace forty-nine cubits. And it broke through and burned those of the Chaldeans whom it caught about the furnace. But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace. And made the midst of the furnace like a moist whistling wind, so that the fire did not touch them not at all, neither hurt nor troubled them. Then the three, as out of one mouth, praised, glorified, and blessed, God in the furnace, saying, Blessed art thou, O Lord God of our fathers: and to be praised and exalted above all forever."

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And blessed is thy glorious and holy name: and to be praised and exalted above all forever.

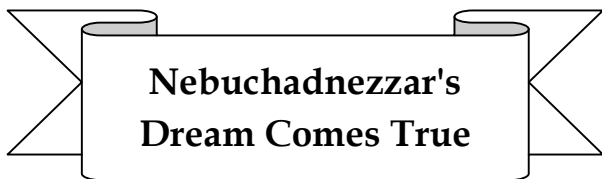
Praise inside the fiery furnace, free of any requests is the highest form of praise, for it is the love of God without wanting a payback! This passage, as mentioned can be found in the completion of (Dan 3 : 51 – 90). The Orthodox Church uses it for the praise: the 3rd Canticle (Hoos) which is sung every night. The three youths call on the whole creation to join them in praising God.

The three companions were not mentioned later. The last we hear from them is this magnificent praise of their God.

Daniel was absent during this episode, and no doubt when he heard about it, he wished he was there to have

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been in furnace as well. Daniel's turn came later when he was thrown into the lion's den.



King Nebuchadnezzar's life takes an unimaginable turn, following a dream, which Daniel interprets and after its fulfillment the king gives God the praise due His name. Chapter four is narrated by Nebuchadnezzar himself.

Nebuchadnezzar narrates his story

"Nebuchadnezzar the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Highest God has worked for me. How great are His signs, And how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion is

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from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise [men] of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation" (Dan 4 : 1 - 7)

Nebuchadnezzar had previously, on two occasions testified to the greatness of God (Dan 2 & 3) but it was not long before he went back to his arrogant and tyrannical ways. Our God is long-suffering and compassionate and here we see how

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He decided to deal with King Nebuchadnezzar through a dream.

The Babylonian Kingdom under Nebuchadnezzar had conquered many nations and he was feeling his power and authority were extending to all parts of the known world. In the middle of his triumphalism, God's hand strikes to prevent his pride and arrogance destroying him for the Lord said: **"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die O house of Israel?"** (Eze 33 : 11)

The story started with a nightmare which left the king unable to sleep and greatly disturbed. As usual he called his magicians, soothsayers, Chaldeans and astrologers but this time he told them his dream outright and asked for its

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interpretation. Getting many different interpretations left him thinking that they were deceiving him.

The King asks Daniel to interpret the strange dream

"But at last Daniel came before me (his name [is] Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him [is] the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, [saying].: Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God [is] in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation. These [were] the visions of my head [while] on my bed: "I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves

[were] lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it [was] food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it. I saw in the visions of my head [while] on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, [Bound] with a band of iron and bronze, In the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and [let] him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from [that of] a man, Let him be given the heart of a beast, And let seven times pass over him. This decision [is] by the decree of the watchers, And the

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sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men. This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise [men] of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you [are] able, for the Spirit of the Holy God [is] in you." (Dan 4 : 8 - 18)

In the book of Job, Elihu by divine inspiration says ...

"For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls upon men, While slumbering on their beds, Then He opens the ears of men, And seals their instruction. In order to turn man from his deed, And conceal

pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword." (Jobs 33:14- 18)

As none of the Babylonian wise men could interpret the dream, the king summoned Daniel, because he had learnt to trust in Daniel's dream interpretations. He believed that Daniel had the spirit of the gods and although he himself did not know Daniel's God, he trusted His. He told Daniel the dream and waited for the interpretation.

In the dream, the king saw a great tree that reached the heaven above in its height, its leaves were beautiful and its fruits abundant. Animals sheltered underneath it and birds lived in its branches. The fruit was food for all. Suddenly a Holy One Descended from heaven and ordered the tree to be cut off

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and scatter its leaves and send away the animals from underneath and the birds from its branches. He ordered it to be cut but a stump left in the ground fettered with a band of iron and bronze.

The Holy One then spoke about a man who was to be left among the animals and become like them for seven periods of time so that all would know that the Almighty God reigned over all the kingdoms of men.

Upon finishing his dream the king waited for Daniel's interpretation.

The dream's interpretation

"Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. [So] the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation

trouble you" Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, [may] the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies.! The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which [could be seen] by all the earth. Whose leaves [were] lovely and its fruit abundant, in which [was] food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home. It [is] you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth. And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, [bound] with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with

the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him. This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king. They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump [and] roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by [being] righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to [the] poor. Perhaps

there may be a lengthening of your prosperity." (Dan 4 : 19 - 27)

The interpretation was clear in front of Daniel, so he was troubled by the judgment that God had prepared for the king, and his appearance changed, so that the king noticed change and asked him to tell the truth whatever it was. Daniel pitied the king and said that he wished that the dream was regarding the king's enemies. He then had to inform the king of the bitter reality that was going to befall him.

That tree was the king and God's judgment was coming, and the man who was going to go into the wild and live like an animal for seven periods (maybe seven years) was the king. He was only returning to his kingdom after acknowledging that the Almighty God was the one with real

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authority and not a mere man, however powerful he was.

As Daniel had a friendly relationship with the king, he offered him advice. If he left his sins God might forgive him.

Daniel talked about God and repentance even to idolaters. He was not fearful for his life and insisted on speaking the truth even to a tyrannical king.

Twelve months time before the judge being executed

"All [this] came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty. While the word [was still] in the king's mouth, a

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voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you. And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling [shall be] with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Dan 4 : 28 - 32)

The Kingdom of Babylon was wealthy and powerful; it was a great civilization with art and architecture. The hanging gardens of Babylon were among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Nebuchadnezzar had married Princess Semiramis who before her marriage dwelt in a beautiful palace among green hills. He decided to build her a magnificent palace surrounded with

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gardens unrivalled in the whole ancient world.

However, should a mere created man boast over the Creator who made him? The created should show gratitude and acknowledgment of his Creator; and God had warned the king through the dream, but alas, we see him standing at the window of his palace, looking out and reveling in what he has made! There is no mention of God or any acknowledgement of His power; until he hears a voice reminding him of his inevitable fate of which he was fore-warned. He was going to be driven out of his kingdom to live with and like the wild beasts for seven periods, until he acknowledged that God is the One who truly reigns over the entire universe and is Almighty and all powerful.

*Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Comes True

Our gracious God warns sinners to give them a chance to repent.

The people of Ninevah took advantage of God's warning and offer of forgiveness to those who repent.

We also read in the bible about King Ahab who was given another chance after being warned, when he repented and wore sackcloth and humbled himself before the Lord. God's forgiveness extended to Ahab, although God knew that it would be temporary.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar a chance and left him for a year to ponder the warnings to no avail.

Judgment takes place

"The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and

his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' [feathers], and his nails like birds' [claws]. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion [is] an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom [is] from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth [are] reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and [among] the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What does thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent

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majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works [are] truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan 4 : 33 - 37)

Nebuchadnezzar's illness has remained a mystery. Was he possessed by an evil spirit and became like the Gadarene demon-possessed man? Is it a disease, physical or mental that leaves the patient wandering and living like an animal in the open air, eating grass and crawling on all fours?

The king's arrogance and pride constituted far worse madness than that period in the wild. The most powerful king of his time became like an animal, despised by all, for seven periods (might have been years or generations). He

*Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Comes True

stayed in that precarious situation until he looked up to heaven and praised the Almighty God, who was King over all. His mind then returned to him and he returned to his kingdom. He wrote his advice to the generations: God is capable of bringing down the proud.

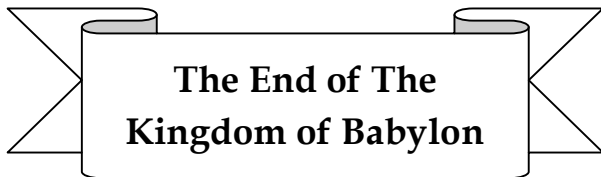
Behaving with pride

If humility is the crown of virtues, then pride is the most reviled vice. It makes you rob God of the glory due to Him. Pride is the devil's sin. It was also the sin planted in Eve's heart, to be "like God".

So, let us learn from what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, and relate every success we achieve to our heavenly King. Whatever we accomplish, it pales into insignificance when compared to the miraculous wonders of God. The last we

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hear about Nebuchadnezzar in the bible are those words: "**Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works [are] truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase**".



**The End of The
Kingdom of Babylon**

The previous chapter ended with a public confession from king Nebuchadnezzar regarding God's power and greatness after he experienced it himself more than once. In the end, he concluded by warning people against pride as he had personal experience of its consequences.

Yet, in spite of many hearing this warning, only few take it into consideration, for many have ears but they don't hear, they resist refusing to learn from the experience and mistakes of others. They pay a hefty price! During the reign of King Belshazzar, grandson of

*The End of The Kingdom of Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar the same attitude was adopted and sadly, the king was not warned by what had happened to his grandfather. During his reign the Babylonian empire was defeated by the empire of the Medes and Persia. Thus ending the golden era of the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar and started the silver era.

The final Banquet

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which [was] in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of

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God which [was] at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" (Da 5 : 1 - 4)

Belshazzar was not as wise as his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. While the king was having a banquet for a thousand dignitaries, his power was greatly diminished and the Medes and Persians were at the gates of the city! His banquet was not at a time of peace and prosperity but rather unrest and strife. The arrogant King Belshazzar was wining and dining while his city was being besieged.

There are other incidents in the bible where it is noted how kings got drunk in banquets and their judgment was greatly impaired, like King Ahasuerus in

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the book of Esther when he banished Queen Vashti (Esther 1).

We also recall King Herod's banquet that ended with the beheading of John the Baptist. Thus we find that many of those worldly banquets end with disaster. The one we will recount had calamitous consequences.

The Bible's stance regarding alcohol

"A little wine is good for the stomach" is a misquote which many use to justify their habits, conveniently discounting the hundreds of verses warning about the dangers of drink.

Some use the miracle at the wedding at Cana, Galilee as another justification, that Jesus Christ Himself drank wine at the Last Supper and used it to change it into His Blood. Others claim

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that **everything is lawful to me** forgetting that there are conditions:

- 1- If the matter is helpful. (1Co 6:12, 10:23)
- 2- If the matter builds. (1 Co 10:23)
- 3- That the matter does not have power over me. (1 Co 6: 12)

We therefore can evaluate the matter and discover that many things, while they are not forbidden, are not helpful, do not build and edify and take control over us. Certainly alcohol falls under this category!

The bible is full of stories about the damage caused by alcohol. We find the righteous Noah drunk and compromised

"Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.
(Gen 9 : 21)

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Lot was given wine by his 2 daughters and ended by sleeping with both of them! (Gen 19)

Solomon teaches us in the book of proverbs:

"Wine [is] a mocker, Strong drink [is] a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise." (Prov 20 : 1)

"Do not mix with winebibbers, [Or] with gluttonous eaters of meat. For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe [a man] with rags." (Prov 23 : 20 - 21)

"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, [When] it

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swirls around smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper."

(Prov 23 : 29 - 32)

In the banquet, King Belshazzar and his court got drunk, and he thought that he could challenge God surreptitiously by using the holy vessels of the altar to drink his wine. He ordered his servants to bring the vessels which his grandfather had seized when he had captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple there. Those vessels were holy, set apart only to be used by the priests during the ritual for the worship of God in His temple

Challenging God

Foolish is the man who thinks that his position or authority allows him to challenge God or make fun of Him! Man is like chaff that the wind scatters!

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"Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding" (Isa 29 : 16)

"Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!" (Isa 10 : 15)

We are reminded of King Ahaziah, one of the kings of Judah, who thought that because he was the king he could command Elijah, the prophet of God to come to him. Fire descended from heaven and burnt two troops of his soldiers and their leaders (2Kings 1)

We also remember King Herod:

"And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, [saying, It is] the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:21-23)

The same fate awaits those who think that they can challenge God or make fun of Him.

King Belshazzar's life ended on that fateful night!

The writing Hand

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of

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the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. [And] the king spoke, and said to the wise [men] of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and tells me it's the interpretation, shall be clothed with scarlet, and [have] a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then came in all the king's wise [men]: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then king Belshazzar was greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished" (Dan 5:5-9)

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There was no more mercy for the king and immediately God's answer came which terrified the king.



All those present at the banquet saw a man's hand appear and it started writing on the wall. The words written were foreign words that the king's wise men could not interpret or explain.

King Belshazzar, who a few moments before was challenging God and drinking wine in the holy altar vessels is now trembling with fear, knees knocking and unable to stand. God did not even send an angel, just a hand to write God's judgment on the arrogant king. He brought it upon himself, drinking wine and

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abusing what God had set apart and sanctified.

God is merciful and longsuffering when he sees the repentance and seriousness of a sinner. King Nebuchadnezzar was serious and God brought him back but Belshazzar was an evil mocker and his judgment day came upon him.

The Queen suggests seek Daniel

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying...

"O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father,

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light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas[a] were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation"
(Dan 5 : 10 – 12)

It is believed that the queen mentioned was Belshazzar's mother, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and that she didn't join in her son's banquet. She had seen God's dealings with her father and knew that Almighty God would not be pleased by her son's actions so she was not at the banquet. Upon hearing what

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had happened and how her son was frightened, she came in at once and advised him to summon the only one who had the Spirit of the Holy God and who could explain what had happened. It seems that Daniel was kept away from the court during this careless king's reign.

Daniel enters in front of the King

"Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives[b] from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the

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interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of you that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan 5: 13 – 16)

The city was besieged and the king's death sentence was passed on him by God. Still he addresses Daniel with arrogance reminding him of his captivity and promising him scarlet robes and gold!

Daniel reminds the King with God's

Almighty

"Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O king,

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the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew

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all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified" (Dan 5: 17 – 23)

Daniel who was bold as a young man is still as bold in truth in his older years. He declined the king's gifts and firmly went on to interpret the writing. This is in contrast to his gentleness in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream! He must have detected the careless mocking attitude of Belshazzar for he did not advise him to repent as he did with his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar.

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Arrogance and mockery not only stop us from benefitting from others; they also prevent us from learning from our own mistakes and we keep repeating them, time after time.

Interpretation of the writing

"Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan 5: 24 – 28)

"You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting" How terrifying are these words, we shake in

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fear lest we should hear them one day. God has granted us many talents 'to trade and profit' in the days of grace that we live in on earth but a day will come when we will be asked to give an account of our stewardship: we might hear **"His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord"** (Matt 25 : 21) or we neglect our talents and hear the dreadful sentence: **"And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (Matt 25 : 30)

The fall of Babylon

"Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he

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should be the third ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old" (Dan 5: 29 – 31)

It seems that the king did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation, for he continued his role as king and benefactor offering Daniel the prize he had promised. He did not use his last moments wisely as the thief on the right hand. He buried his head in the sand and that same night, the Medes and the Persians captured Babylon, killed the king and Darius became king over the new empire of the Medes and Persians.



Nebuchadnezzar's dream was fulfilled and the great Babylonian Empire fell and a new era began: the Persian Kingdom. If Daniel was not prominent in the days of Belshazzar, he was certainly prominent during king Darius' rule, and although 80, he was still the same faithful man that he always was and a faithful servant of God, whatever the cost.

The Beginning of Darius rule

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom. And over these, three governors, of whom Daniel [was] one, that the satraps might give account

to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit [was] in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm" (Dan 6:1-3)

Darius was a wise king, so he divided his kingdom into areas, and for every area he appointed satraps (managers or governors) and over all these, he appointed three ministers, Daniel being one of the three. The satraps were accountable to the three ministers, who in turn were accountable to the king directly.

Darius' wisdom is evident in his choice of Daniel, in spite of his old age. He must have studied the history of the great Nebuchadnezzar and read about Daniel's wisdom. Daniel proved himself by his

efficiency and excelling over the other ministers. He had the Spirit of God and king Darius was intending to set him above the other ministers and over the whole kingdom.

The Plot against Daniel

"So the governors and satraps sought to find [some] charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he [was] faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find [it] against him concerning the law of his God. So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever.! All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal

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statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter. Therefore King Darius signed the written decreer" (Dan 6 : 4 - 9)

Daniel was successful, but his success aroused the jealousy of others. They watched him, trying to fault him but to no avail. Daniel was honest and faithful in whatever he undertook. They discovered though that he was also faithful to his God and as a Jew would not worship other gods.

A dossier of errors

Normally courtiers try to draw closer to a king to attain power and

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authority and use all means, legal and illegal to achieve that coveted position. Finding fault with a competitor is a much used weapon. A dossier of errors would be filed and prepared against the person who is to be toppled from power. Daniel's file, though, was clean. He was faultless and the rest of the court men could not bring a case against him. The only thing they could accuse him of was a crown that adorned his head: he was faithful concerning the law of His God. It is an accusation that would be an honor to any of us.

Often, in Egypt, people hear praise mixed with castigation: "This person is perfect but unfortunately is a Christian!"

Many have been imprisoned, unlawfully, after evidence was planted to convict them, their only crime being a

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Christian. The plots for those 'crimes' are often more elaborate than actual crimes!

A plot was being hatched against Daniel. Through flattering the king, they managed to convince him to issue a royal decree, which once signed could never be revoked, not even by him. The royal decree established Darius as god for a month, when people were to pray only to King Darius. They were forbidden from asking anyone or any god for anything during that month. Only the king was to be entreated. Any person disobeying the decree would be thrown into the lion's den.

This appealed to the king's pride and he did not realize that by signing the decree he had handed them the means of sentencing Daniel to death.

The dangerous of hypocrisy

Each position in life has its weak spot that the devil can utilize to ambush his victim. For it is warfare! The enemy penetrates the fortress through the weak spot!

Through flattery and hypocrisy, those with power and authority can be trapped and fall into the net. Some believe that they were the only leaders on earth and that the world would stop going round without them! They are the shadow of the Almighty on earth!

Most flatterers are hypocrites, desiring to draw closer to a leader for their own personal gain. Some lose the distinction between the necessary honor to be shown to those in authority and responsibility, fulfilling God's

commandment, and flattery that the devil uses to trap the proud.

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Rom 13:1), for they harm those they honor rather than praise them.

The one hearing flattering words should be wary. One must be aware that at such a moment there is great temptation. Only humility and God's grace can save from this temptation. Lift your heart in prayer to be kept from taking what you hear to heart and believing it. Remember what happened to King Herod when the people flattered him saying that his voice was the voice of God and not man. He reveled in that comment, not giving any glory to God and was struck by

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the angel of the Lord in the same moment.
(Acts 12:22-23)

The wise King Darius was tempted and fell. He was convinced that he was like a god to his people and deserved to be treated as one for he could fulfill their requests, just as God could. He signed the decree only to deeply regret it afterwards.

Daniel prays as usual

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you

not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives[a] from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day" (Dan 6: 10- 13)

The decree was issued but it had no impact on Daniel's life. He might have guessed that it was meant to trap him; but his love for God could not be moved. His life was not more precious in his eyes than his regular daily encounters with his God. Maybe friends advised him to keep quiet and not challenge the authorities, for what

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was one month of acquiescing until he weathered the storm. He might have been advised to pray in secret, to be able to live and carry on helping those he was serving. Closing the windows while praying was an acceptable compromise!

Daniel knew that God was to be obeyed more than people. He was used to praying in a certain manner and he was not about to compromise his faith. The matter was settled without it ever being an issue for him. Maybe this was his chance to be blessed as the three youths who were thrown in the fiery furnace.

Thus on the first day of the decree, as usual, Daniel went home, opened his window, looked towards Jerusalem and bowed and worshipped the God he loved, unconcerned and unmoved by whoever was watching him.

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Immediately the conspirators reported his 'crime' and the breaking of Darius' decree to the king

The price of praying

Praying for Daniel was a costly experience but that was of no concern to him. He looked towards Jerusalem, where one day when Solomon built the temple and the altar was consecrated, he had prayed:

"Or if Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to them and their fathers" (2Chr 6:24-25)

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Many, over the centuries, have considered their lives worth paying for the sake of God. During the cold war, those who took bibles across the iron curtain risked their lives every day as they continued to take Christian material to those living in Eastern Europe.

The King's anger

"And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed" (Dan 6:14–15)

The king discovered that he was set up and was distressed as he saw that it

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was his trusted friend Daniel who was going to pay the price of the flattery that he had enjoyed. He tried very hard to revoke the decree or get around it but until sunset he was still unable to change what had happened. He was reminded of the law of the land by the conspirators, the wise men who wanted Daniel destroyed.

Throwing Daniel in the den

"So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed" (Dan 6: 16 – 17)

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The king had two choices: either to break the law, exposing himself to ridicule and maybe even loss of the throne, or to obey the law, sacrificing his trusted friend, minister and faithful adviser. Both choices were difficult and bitter for the king but he put his hope in the God of Daniel, although he did not know Him.

The king must have thought that Daniel's God would never leave him to perish, but would save him, and on this hope the king ordered the execution of the sentence.

The soldiers went and captured Daniel, even though they must have known about the injustice of their actions. We do not hear about any resistance shown to the soldiers who were simply obeying the orders, but Daniel went

willingly and happily, like a lover going to meet his beloved!

What would we have seen had we been there?

A very deep hole in the earth, with the stench of a lion's den emanating from it. Its opening is closed with a massive stone rolled in place to prevent the escape of any condemned prisoner. The roars would declare the hunger of the beasts as they got ready to tear apart the limbs of any creature thrown to them. Had the conspirators been starving the lions for a week to ensure Daniel's quick demise? It would be possible!

We then would have seen a solemn procession moving from the palace and proceeding to the den. Darius would have been visibly distressed as he walked next to his trusted minister, whom he could no

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longer save. The king's hope was in Daniel's God, the only one who could save him.

The guards must have been apprehensive. Did they hear the stories told about the soldiers who perished trying to throw the three youths in the fiery furnace? Maybe they have even heard about the soldiers who many centuries ago had gone to capture a prophet called Elijah and bring him to King Ahaziah and what had befallen them.

As for Daniel, he would have been walking calmly, praying, thanking God for having considered him worthy of the honor of martyrdom

The lions' roars were deafening declaring their hunger and anticipation of food being thrown to them.

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With great difficulty, the soldiers rolled the stone, and quickly pushed Daniel in and rolled back the stone. They were not taking any risks in dallying at the entrance, for the lions were very hungry.

Daniel entered knowing that he was about to meet God, either incarnate in the den or in heaven as he is eaten alive. So he entered the den saying with St. Paul: **"For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's"** (Rom 14: 8)

The bible leaves us uninformed about what happened next.

Maybe Daniel went into the den amidst the deafening roars, only to find a dazzling appearance by the Lord's angel stopping the lions from attacking him.

Maybe he entered expecting lions to tear him apart so as he knelt down to pray, closing his eyes, he could no longer hear their roars. Surprised at the quiet, he was surprised to see the lions sitting quietly watching this man of God pray, as was his usual. God had changed the nature of the lions just as He had done with the nature of the fire in the furnace.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was sentenced to death by the Pharisees out of envy. He was put into the tomb and the stone rolled over its entrance, believing that the One they wished dead was gone. The lions with all their power and strength could not kill Daniel just as death could not vanquish our Lord as He rose from the dead

The world's den

Often we feel that we have descended into the world's den and surrounded by lions waiting to devour us. Let us trust that all things work together for the good of those who love God.

Daniel saved

"Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His

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angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you. Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God" (Dan 6: 18 – 23)

The king returned back to his palace with a heavy heart. He spent an anxious night, unable to sleep and at dawn, hastened to the den with a mixture of hope and fear.

With trepidation, Darius called out to Daniel. Could the God he worshipped have saved him? Was He able to save him from the fierce hungry lions?

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What joy and jubilation must he have felt when he heard Daniel's voice answering him that His God sent angels to deliver him from the lions!

*Could that
be true! Was
that really
Daniel's voice?*



He ordered the den to be opened immediately and his friend be brought out to him to confirm his safety and the miracle that His God had delivered.

This reminds us of the Marys going to the tomb at dawn, Sunday morning to anoint the body of Christ, only to find the stone rolled and the tomb empty, for the Lord has risen and had conquered death forever.

The end of the conspirators

"And the king gave the command, and they brought those men, who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den"

(Dan 6: 24)

They dug a hole and fell in it! The king could now turn to the conspirators and the den of lions was again visited but this time with those who had prepared it for Daniel.

Darius honors God

"Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear

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before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Dan 6: 24 – 28)

Like the previous chapters, this one ends with a king giving honor and glory to God having witnessed the faithfulness of His servants.

We'll review some verses from those historical chapters:

- **Chapter 1:** Nebuchadnezzar's test of Daniel and the fellows ...

"And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king

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examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm"

(Dan 1: 20)

- **Chapter 2:** Daniel's knowledge of the dream and its interpretation ...

"The king answered Daniel, and said, Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret" (Dan 2:47)

- **Chapter 3:** The three youths are delivered safe from the fiery furnace ...

"Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel[b] and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!" (Dan 3: 28)

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- **Chapter 4:** After Nebuchadnezzar returned from his time in the wilderness ...

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down" (Dan 4: 37)

- **Chapter 5:** after Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall ...

"Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and [put] a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan 5:29)

- **Chapter 6:** King's Darius testimony written after Daniel was delivered from the lions' den ...

"I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Dan 6: 26-27)

Prosperous Daniel

"So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Dan 6: 28)

Daniel was contemporary of four rulers while he was in captivity as an exile: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. He was a faithful witness to his God, and it was during the reign of King Cyrus that the Jews started their return to

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Jerusalem. Daniel would have been quite old at the time and some believe that he showed Cyrus Isaiah's prophecy, written nearly 150 years before and mentioning Cyrus' name as the one who would be instrumental in the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after their captivity.

**"Who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd,
and he shall perform all My pleasure,
Saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built,
And to the temple, Your foundation shall
be laid. Thus says the Lord to His
anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I
have held—To subdue nations before
him And loose the armor of kings, To
open before him the double doors, So
that the gates will not be shut: I will go
before you And make the crooked
places[a] straight; I will break in pieces the
gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I
will give you the treasures of darkness.**

And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me" (Isa 44:28 – 45:5)

Tradition says that Cyrus was astonished to find his name mentioned in Isaiah's prophecy, long before he was born. He read the manuscripts that were written long before his birth and he ordered the return of the captives to the land of their fathers, as was prophesied. He knew that it was true as Cyrus was not a known name at the time of the prophecy. The story of the return of the exiled Jewish captives is written in the

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books of Nehemiah and Ezra, and the return from captivity was over three stages: the first one was under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:6), then under the leadership of Ezra (Ezra 7:10), then the third one under the leadership of Nehemiah.

1- The First return: was in year 538 B.C. and was under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua and the number of those who returned was 49697. They started building the temple, but they stopped building it for some time and they completed it in year 516 B.C. (Ezra 1-6)

2- The second return: was in year 458 B.C. and it was under the leadership of Ezra the priest and the scribe. 1758 people returned and Ezra tried to solve the problems arising from the mixed

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marriages between the Jews and the foreign women. (Ezra 7-10)

3- The third return: was in year 444 B.C. and was under the leadership of Nehemiah, the number of those who returned is unknown. Nehemiah started building the wall of Jerusalem and finished it in 52 days. (Nehemiah 1:13)

This ends the historical section of the book Daniel, let us now look at the prophetic section.



**Daniel's Visions and
Their Interpretations**

Visions are a means by which God speaks to His people, revealing to them events in the future or spiritual facts. The understanding and interpretation of visions in the bible is a difficult matter, and there are often many differing opinions put forward by the great saints and early church fathers. Sometimes the fulfillment of the vision or prophecy occurs in more than one historical era, leaving us wondering whether it would be fulfilled again or not?

We are going to mention the most widely accepted interpretations of the visions of Daniel, without casting doubt on any other interpretations.

Daniel's First Vision

"Four Animals representing Four Kingdoms"

Daniel's vision in chapter 7 is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue (Dan 2) and it reveals to us the succession of the four kingdoms as we saw before in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

This vision happened almost in year 550 B.C. in the first year of the king Belshazzar who was a careless mocker. He did not search for the truth as his father Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel avoided working for him, devoting his time to meditation on the word of God, fasting and praying. He was rewarded with these visions.

The first animal:

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it"
(Dan 7:1-4)

The lion in its strength represents the Babylonian Kingdom and the two wings represent the quick spread of the kingdom. The Babylonians had used the

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lion with its wings as a sign for their kingdom...

Plucking the two wings represents the period of seven years in which king Nebuchadnezzar was in the wilderness living like animals until he acknowledged the Almighty God. It could also represent and it can represent the contraction of the kingdom and its weakness under the reign of Belshazzar his successor. The animal was given a human heart instead of a lion's heart as Nebuchadnezzar declared the authority of God rather than any human being. This animal corresponds to the golden head of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The second animal:

"And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!" (Dan 7:5)

The bear represents the kingdom of the Medes and Persia. It is raised up on one side, because Persia overcame the Median Empire and the two kingdoms became one (the Persian kingdom) and the bear had in its mouth three ribs left from devouring its enemies. It arose and had wide conquests represented by the devoured flesh.

And this second animal corresponds to the chest and the two silver arms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The third animal:

"After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it" (Dan 7:6)

The leopard represents the Macedonian Alexander the great, king of Greece. The four wings represent the quick spread of his kingdom, and he swept the world in a short time due to the excellence of his leaders who are represented by the four heads. After the death of Alexander in year 323 B.C. his kingdom was divided among his leaders and became four kingdoms, the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt and the Seleucid Dynasty in Syria and Israel were two of those kingdoms. The leopard corresponds to the bronze stomach (belly) and thighs in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The fourth animal:

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words" (Dan 7: 7 - 8)

The fourth animal represents the Seleucid Kingdom in Syria and Israel. The ten horns represent ten kings who ruled over the kingdom ...

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They were as follows ... (1- Seleucus I ... 2- Antiochus I ... 3- Antiochus II ... 4- Seleucus II ... 5- Seleucus III ... 6- Antiochus III ... 7- Seleucus IV ... 8- Heliodoros ... 9- Ptolemy VI ... 10- Demetrios)

The small horn is the eleventh king Antiochus IV (Epiphanies) who defeated the last three kings and they are 8,9,10 (plucked three horns) and took the kingdom from them.

And the eyes in the horns represent his extreme wariness of his enemies, and the mouth speaking great things represents his pride and arrogance. He challenged the worship of God by severe persecution of God's people ...

Vision of the Ancient of Days

**"I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated; His
garment was white as snow, And the hair
of His head was like pure wool. His throne**

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was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened"

(Dan 7: 9-10)

Daniel sees judgment day, a vision similar to that of St John in the Book of Revelation. Daniel describes God as the Ancient of Days, meaning eternal. His clothes are as white as snow and his hair as pure wool denoting His purity and justice.

Fiery throne with fiery wheels denotes the power of Almighty God, so that all worship Him and bow down before Him waiting for the opening of the books and the beginning of judgment.

Judgment day:

How dreadful is the day when we are called to stand before the throne of God and the book is opened that has our works recorded in! How many things that we ignored are we going to discover have great value with God, while others that we valued greatly, He considers totally worthless. Let us be ready for that day.

The destruction of the fourth animal:

"I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. as for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time" (Dan 7: 11 - 12)

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What would happen to this arrogant king (eleventh horn) who was persecuting God's people, Daniel wondered sadly. It was then that he heard a voice and he watched in awe as the fourth animal, with the eleventh horn representing King Antiochus Epiphanies is killed and burnt, while the rest of the beasts were just weakened. Those surrounding kingdoms survived but much weaker than the cruel Seleucid Empire.

The coming of the son of man

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting

**dominion, Which shall not pass away,And
His kingdom the one Which shall not be
destroyed"** (Dan 7 : 13 - 14)

After God's people were freed from the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanies, Daniel saw the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) which points to the incarnation of the Son of God in the fullness of time. Jesus Christ liked to call Himself Son of Man to remind the Jews that He was the one that Daniel wrote about.

Jesus Christ was brought before the Ancient of Days .He was a sacrifice on the cross to redeem fallen mankind. Having freed humanity from the cruelty of Satan and not just Antiochus Epiphanies, He is given honor, glory and dominion and His Kingdom shall not pass away and will last forever.

Daniel's Visions Interpreted

"I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. but the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words,

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whose appearance was greater than his fellows. I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom" (Dan 7 : 15 – 22)

Daniel hadn't yet understood the meaning of what he saw, and was terrified. He asked one of the angels for the interpretation and the angel clarified the mystery of the four animals.

"Thus he said:'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all other kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces. The ten horns are ten kings Who shall arise from this kingdom. And another

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shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, And shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time. 'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.' This is the end of the account.[e] As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart" (Dan 7:23- 28)

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The angel continued explaining the revelation to Daniel clarifying to him that ten kings will arise from a kingdom (Seleucid Kingdom) then an eleventh king will arise who will defeat 3 kings and in his arrogance and conceit will challenge God and persecute His people. He will prevent the Jews from performing their worship rituals for three and a half years (a time and times and the dividing times). This is the time when sacrifice was stopped in the altar as Antiochus Epiphanies defiled the temple. It was later purified at the hands of the Maccabees (1 Macc 4:25)

But evil will be destroyed by God and His Kingdom will last forever Daniel was disturbed by his vision and kept it to himself.

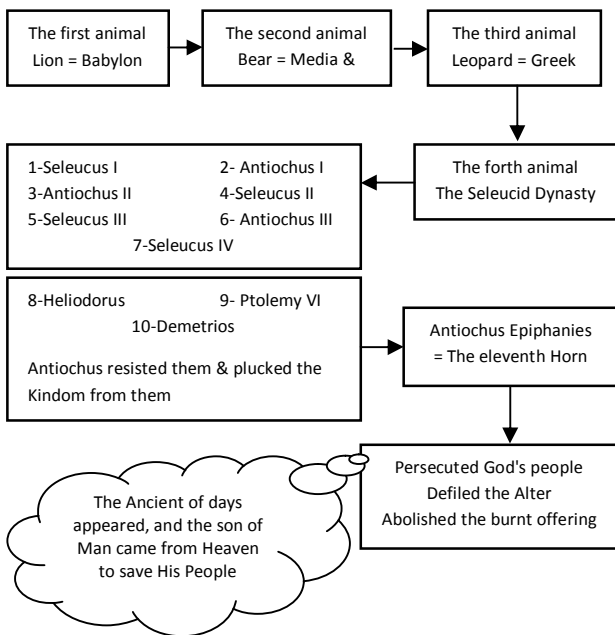
The end of the wicked

The wicked could be arrogant and conceited and exert power to dominate others. They could forget God and become a source of evil but however long it may last, it will come to an end. God is patient and long-suffering, giving everyone chances to repent but eventually they run out of time and God's judgment comes upon them.

God was patient with Pharaoh giving him one chance after another. He sent ten plagues, each being an opportunity for repentance and acknowledgment of God, but destruction came in the end. Nothing lasts under the sun. So let us not be deceived thinking that the wicked will prevail, for God will reward each according to his deeds.

*Daniel's Visions and Their Interpretations

The summary of the first vision



Daniel's Second Vision

"The ram and the goat (Persia and Greece)"

"In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me—to me, Daniel—after the one that appeared to me the first time. I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai" (Dan 8:1-2)

The interpretation of this second vision was the same as the vision in "Dan 7". God was confirming His decision. This vision happened in year 548 B.C. in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king, ten years before the fall of Babylon , as he saw a strong ram butting with his two horns followed by a great goat which defeated the ram and stepped on it. Daniel didn't understand the vision, so

God sent to him the Archangel Gabriel to explain it to him.

The ram with the two horns

"Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great" (Dan 8 : 3 - 4)

The ram with the two horns represents Media and Persia, and one of them is higher than the other, because the Persians conquered the Medes and it became known as the Persian Kingdom. It spread in all directions except towards the

east towards India and China where it did not have any possessions.

The goat coming from the west

"And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. 8Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four

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notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven" (Dan 8 : 5 - 8)

The goat represents the Greek Empire, the notable horn is Alexander the Great who came from the west, from Macedonia. Not touching the ground meant the amazing speed by which he conquered the world. Alexander the Great swept away the Persian Empire (the ram) and nobody was able to stand before him.

This is confirmed by history when Alexander the great appeared in 333 B.C. that is 200 years after Daniel's prophecy when he had seen him.

The small horn

"Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four

winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land" (Dan 8 : 8-9)

Alexander the Great died aged 33 and his empire was divided amongst his four generals. The great horn broke and four horns appeared. The Seleucid Empire ruled over Syria and Israel and from them came Antiochus Epiphanies, the small horn, who became powerful and persecuted the people of Israel.

The profanity of the small horn

"And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast

down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered"

(Dan 8:10- 12)

Antiochus grew in arrogance to the point where he tried to stop all Jewish rituals. He tried to stop circumcision, abolish celebrating the Sabbath and offering burnt or any other offerings. He tried to stop the celebration of festivals, and even defiled the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. He placed his idols in the court so that all worshippers would pass by them when going in. Hundreds were killed and manuscripts burnt. He was allowed to humiliate the Jews for a while. He is a symbol for the antichrist who will come in the latter days, mislead people and then be destroyed by God.

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This is what Jesus Christ meant by abomination of desolation when He said ...

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house" (Matt 24:15-17)

The temple was defiled by Antiochus in 170 B.C. and again by Titus, the Roman commander who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. In both situations idols were placed in the temple on the altar.

When will the sanctuary get purified?

"Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, How long will the

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vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?. And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Dan 8 : 13 - 14)

Daniel could hear two angels talking about the defilement of the temple and its re-consecration. This was to happen after 2300 days, i.e. six years, three months and twenty days. That was the period in which Antiochus Epiphanies persecuted the Jews, from 171 B.C. until his death in 165 B.C. Jewish worship was re-established in the temple after that period which was prophesied in Daniel's vision.

Gabriel Interprets the Vision

"Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end." Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be" (Dan 8:15- 19).

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As Daniel was confused and asked for the meaning of his vision, he heard the voice of God sending the archangel Gabriel to explain to him what he had seen and what was to happen at the end of times. This is similar to what had happened to St. John and is documented in the book of Revelation. When the voice of God is heard both Daniel and later St. John, fell on their faces, terrified.

When the 'end of times' is mentioned there are two meanings:

- 1- A near end which is that of the Jewish nation. This was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed and burnt down by Titus, the Roman leader.
- 2- The end of the world and the second coming of Christ and Judgment Day.

Uncovering the mystery of the vision

"The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom[b] of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power. "And in the latter time of their kingdom, When the transgressors have reached their fullness, A king shall arise, Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes" (Dan 8 : 20 – 23)

The angel started explaining the vision to Daniel clarifying that the ram represents the kingdom of Media and Persia followed by the kingdom of Greece (the powerful male goat) and its first king is Alexander the Great and after his death

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(his being broken) the kingdom was divided into four sections between the four leaders which are referred to as 4 horns but they are not as powerful as Alexander the Great.

And when the Jews reach their full transgression stage (i.e. the sin has risen and they have to be punished), a little horn appears (a king with fierce face and a person who understands the tricks = Antiokos Abifanious) and he came and God allowed him to punish His nation so as they would repent.

The end of the Tyrant

"His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people." "Through his

cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without human means" (Dan 8 : 24 – 25)

The book of Maccabees documents the history of the Jews during that turbulent time under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanies of the Seleucid Dynasty. His reign began in 171 B.C., when he ordered all the rituals of Jewish worship to be stopped, including circumcision. Mattathias and his five sons led the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid tyrant in 167-160 B.C. They were the Maccabees and they destroyed the idols in Judah and those placed in the temple and ordered the return of the worship of God and all the boys were circumcised. Their army

*Daniel's Visions and Their Interpretations

freed Jerusalem from its occupation and also dealt with the Hellenising Jews who wanted to be like the Greeks. When Antiochus was informed about the Jewish revolt and uprising, he led his army back to reconquer Jerusalem. On his way, he was taken ill and as he lay on his deathbed, he proclaimed that his terminal illness was the result of his savagery against the people of God. Thus Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without human means.

Judas Maccabeus went up to Jerusalem after liberating it and established the worship in the temple after consecrating a new altar for sacrifices. They celebrated the Feast of Dedication, which we read about in John 10:22, which Jesus celebrated.

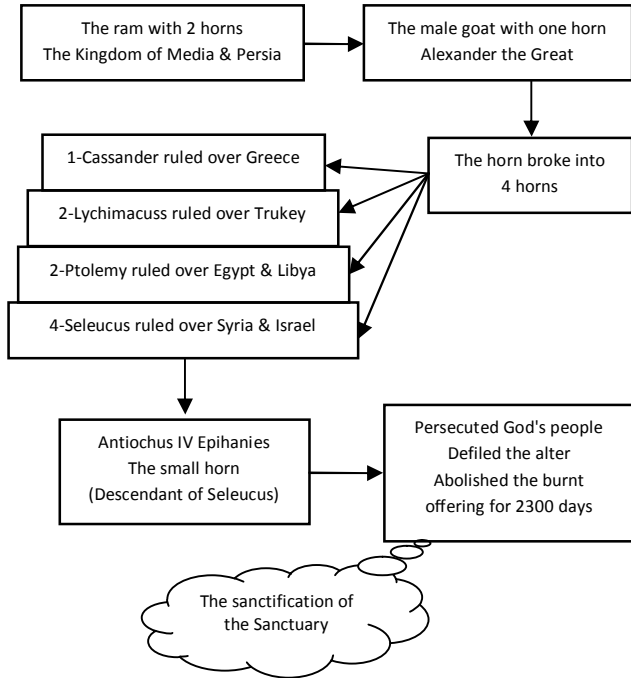
The vision of many days

"And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which was told is true; Therefore seal up the vision, For it refers to many days in the future. And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it" (Dan 8: 26- 27)

Daniel was confused by the vision. It was about the end of the world and he could not fathom how God could sometimes allow extreme evil to rule. He did not reveal the vision to anyone, as ordered; and pursued his work for the king, though tired and confused by what had been revealed to him.

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The summary of the second vision



Daniel's prayer and the third Vision
(the seventy weeks)

The period of captivity

"In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans. In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan 9 : 1 - 3)

We had seen Daniel, the man of prayer, earlier in the book. Now we have further confirmation of the life of prayer and fasting that made him such a humble servant of God.

Daniel, who had studied Jeremiah's prophecy, knew that the period of captivity was seventy years:

"For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find [Me,] when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive" (Jer 29:10-14)

Daniel's prayer

"And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments. we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness [belongs] to You, but to us shame of face, as [it is] this day -- to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You. O Lord, to us

[belongs] shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God [belong] mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem" (Dan 9 : 4 - 12)

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This is one of the hidden treasures in the bible! When Daniel discovered what was to happen to Jerusalem and his people, he repented, wore sackcloth and put ashes on his head, while fasting and praying. He humbled himself before God asking Him to forgive His people.

The importance of confession

Repentance start when man feels the enormity of his sins and confesses them, and although Daniel was a faithful servant of God, yet he stood praying and confessing on behalf of his people. He saw them as one body, just like the priest praying for himself and on behalf of his people, so that God may forgive them. We see Daniel's humility, who did not consider himself superior to the people, but he confessed as if he had shared with them in

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their sins. The true shepherd considers that the sins of his flock are his sins.

It was expected that as an exile in captivity, Daniel would start his prayers complaining about the hard circumstances he had to put up with, reproaching God for allowing them. It is sobering to find him praising God and acknowledging His greatness. He then starts recounting the sins of the people for not taking the warnings of God and His prophets seriously, and disobeying the precepts set in the Law. Daniel acknowledges that their captivity was deserved due to their disobedience.

Daniel reminds God of His promises

"As [it is] written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the

LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God [is] righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as [it is] this day -- we have sinned, we have done wickedly.! O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people [are] a reproach to all [those] around us. Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is

desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." (Dan 9 : 13 - 19)

After confessing the sins of the people, Daniel reminds God of His mercy and faithfulness. He reminds Him for His love for His people and all His promises. He asks God to turn away from His anger and the destruction of Jerusalem and to bring back the people from captivity.

The third vision (70 weeks)

"Now while I [was] speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God. yes, while I [was] speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed [me,] and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell [you,] for you [are] greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision" (Dan 9:20-23)

Daniel studied Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer 29:10-14) and he knew that

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the period of captivity was seventy years. 68 years had already passed (from 538 B.C.-606 B.C. = the first year for the rule of Darius the Persian), and thus he knew that the time was soon, when they could go back, so he started to ask and entreat God that He might have mercy upon His people and bring them back to Jerusalem. And God saw his humility and his penitence, so He sent the Archangel Gabriel to reassure him, not just about the Jews and the return from exile, but also about the salvation of the whole world. He was informed that after 70 weeks the offering and sacrifice in the temple will cease, for what it stood for and resembled was no longer required as the coming of Christ has fulfilled it.

The beloved man

Only Daniel was given that particular title by God; does that make him the only one beloved by God?

Certainly not, for God loves all His children, but each has a unique title. St. Mary was full of grace and John the Baptist was the greatest born to women.

From a very young age, Daniel loved God and was faithful. He refused to be defiled by the king's food and wine, delicacies that all youth would desire. He was instrumental in getting Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the greatness of God. When his life depended on not praying overtly to God, he preferred to be thrown into the lions' den than to bow to anyone other than God,

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which led to Darius' confession of the greatness of God.

Throughout his life, Daniel led a life of humility and submission to God, so that God revealed to him what He was going to do, through visions and through the archangel Gabriel who was sent specifically to explain the visions to the beloved Daniel.

What title do you think God will give you?

The seventy weeks

"Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and

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understand, [That] from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, [There shall be] seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it [shall be] with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate" (Dan 9:24-27)

God rewarded the faithful Daniel with a revelation of His plans for the

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salvation of all mankind. He gave him timing of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion.

The seventy weeks are years and not days, $70 \times 7 = 490$ years.

The seventy weeks start from when the order came to renew Jerusalem and build it in year 457 B.C. on the hands of king Artaxerxes in the time of Nehemiah (Ezra 7:7)

The seventy weeks is divided into three parts as follows:

1- The first part: 7 weeks ... meaning $7 \times 7 = 49$ years which is the time that Nehemiah and those with him took to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (from 408-457 B.C.)

2- The second part: 62 weeks ... meaning $62 \times 7 = 434$ years (from 408 B.C.-26 A.D. B.C.) The Jews endured hard times of persecution and spiritual wilderness when God seemed to be silent, not sending any prophets, until John the Baptist. People turned up to him at the River Jordan in droves to be baptized.

It is widely believed that Jesus Christ was born in 4 B.C. In 26 A.D. he was 30 years old and he started his ministry which lasted for three and a half years.

3- The third part: the last week =7 years, and is divided into two parts:

A-The first half = 3.5 years. And it is the period of Christ's ministry. He died guiltless (cut off).

B-the Second half of the last week:

There are two interpretations concerning it...

The first interpretation: that this period from the time that Jesus Christ ascended to heaven until the martyrdom of St. Steven 33 A.D. and the beginning of the persecution of the Church by the Jews, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and all Jewish sacrificial worship at the hands of Titus, in fulfillment of Christ's words: "See! Your house is left desolate to you."(Mathew 23:38)

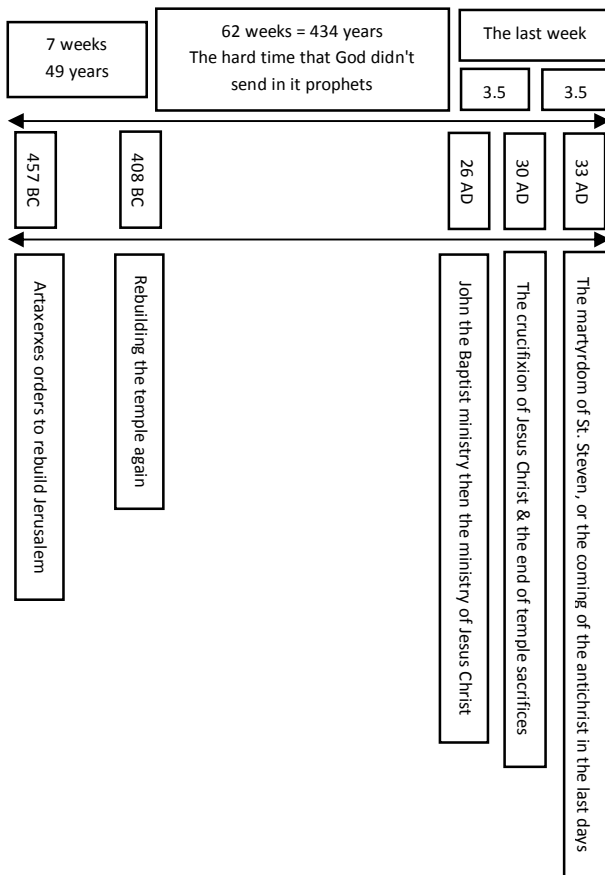
The second interpretation: that this period has not come yet, and is symbolized by a period of 42 months (Revelation 13:1-10) which represents the last days when the Jews accept the antichrist, and thus their last desolation

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will be fulfilled as it was fulfilled at the hands of Titus before. Also both opinions could be right.

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The summary of the third vision (the 70 weeks)



The fourth and last vision

"Daniel sees the Lord Jesus in his splendor Glory"

Daniel's fourth and last vision happened two years from the start of the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. It covered the period when Daniel was alive and extended to foretell the end of times. This vision is recorded in the three chapters from 10-12.

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message [was] true, but the appointed time [was] long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision" (Dan 10 : 1)

Daniel served in the royal Persian palace until the first year of the reign of Cyrus, and then retired from political life.

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Many of the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem but Daniel didn't return. Maybe God kept him in exile to look after the Jews who stayed in Persia. Daniel rested from the labors of the world after the fourth vision, i.e. he died. (Dan 12 : 13)

Daniel's fasts and prays

"In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled" (Dan 10 : 2 - 3)

Daniel was fasting for three weeks in spite of his old age (he was more than 80 years old), and he was mourning the refusal of many Jews to return to Jerusalem because they were very settled financially in the land of exile. He could not comprehend that they would not want to return to the Promised Land once they

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were given permission to go back and rebuild. He fasted (a vegan fast) and prayed.

The Lord appears to Daniel

"Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that [is,] the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist [was] girded with gold of Uphaz.! His body [was] like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude" (Dan 10 : 4 - 6)

Daniel was meditating when he had a vision similar to that of St. John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos. This is one of the appearances of the Son of God before His incarnation. He is wearing linen,

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the material used by priests, for He is the High Priest. His waist is girded, ready for His work (incarnation). In the book of Revelation He appeared girded at the chest, as a Judge ready to judge the living and the dead.

Beryl is a green precious stone which represent the renewal of life.

Daniel saw His face as flashing lightning, while John saw Him like the sun. His eyes like fire penetrating even the darkest places with hidden from Him. His hands and legs like brass symbolizing judgment, and His voice strong like a voice of a multitude terrifying the wicked.

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Jesus Christ in Daniel's vision (Dan 10 : 5 - 6)	Jesus Christ in John's vision (Rev 1 : 13 - 16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Wearing linen.- His waist is girded with gold of uphaz.- His body like berry- His face like the appearance of lightning- His eyes like torches of fire- His feet like burnished bronze in color- The sound of His words is like the voice of multitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Clothed with a garment down to the feet.- Girded about the chest with a golden band- His hands are rods of gold set with beryl- His countenance is like the sun shining in its strength- His eyes like a flame of fire- His feet like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace- His voice as the sound of many waters

The vision that only Daniel saw

"And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground" (Dan 10:7-9)

After a long time in captivity, Daniel would have had disciples and followers accompanying him in his prayers, but only Daniel saw the vision, although he was not alone. They heard the noise and were terrified and fled leaving him alone.

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He fell on his face having lost all strength and was asleep on his face when he saw the vision.



Archangel Gabriel lifts him up and strengthens him

"Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and [on] the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you" While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard;

and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision [refers] to [many] days yet [to come]. When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless" (Dan 10 : 10 - 14)

Daniel fell down on his face from the fear of the Lord, so God sent him the Archangel Gabriel to strengthen him and give him back his peace and calmness. The angel lifted him up and started talking to him gently, reminding him of God's love, and that he came to him specially to

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explain to him what would happen to the Jews in the last days.

God answered Daniel's prayer, from the first day and sent the angel to respond to his demand, but the angel met resistance from the chief of the Persian kingdom who represents the devil, who works to resist God's plans in delivering His people, and the angel stayed resisting his evil plans and Archangel Michael came to support him.

Archangel Gabriel talks to Daniel

"When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And suddenly, [one] having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I

have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me. Then again, [the one] having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace [be] to you; be strong, yes, be strong!" So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me. Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince" (Dan 10 : 15 - 21)

Astounded, Daniel stayed silent. The angel touched his lips to talk, and Daniel told the angel how he was terrified.

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He questioned how Gabriel could manage to speak to the Lord? The Archangel Gabriel again touched him to strengthen him. He told him that he was going to complete his fight against the devil, and that the Archangel Michael would strengthen him. He was going to tell him about the coming events.

Why do the devil's plans succeed for some time?

God might use the devil as a rod of punishment upon His children if they disobey Him, to chastise them. God sometimes allows him to strike some of His children, like St. Paul, lest they become proud (2 Co 12)

God sometimes uses him as fire to purify His children from some sins and like Job, when the impurities are burnt and

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only the virtues remain. For trials and tribulations come upon us, and we often complain and grumble as we doubt God's love and faithfulness to us and do not know that He holds the whole world in His hands.

God had previously told Daniel about the succession of the kingdoms more than once, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue (Dan 2) to the visions where the kingdoms were represented by animals (Dan 7,8), and finally this is repeated in chapter 11. Here he concentrates on the wars that rose between the Ptolemy and the Seleucids, each dynasty trying to conquer Israel.

The succession of kingdoms is repeated but it could also be that those same incidents that have already taken

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place as prophesied by Daniel and have been fulfilled as documented by history, will be repeated again in one way or another, at the end of time. A tyrannical ruler, the antichrist, might arise who will persecute God's people, represented by Antiochus Epiphanies.

And these incidents might be repeated again in a way or another, at the end of the days and end by the appearance of a bloody person persecuting God's people, who is the anti Christ, in whom was symbolized by Antiochus in the previous visions.

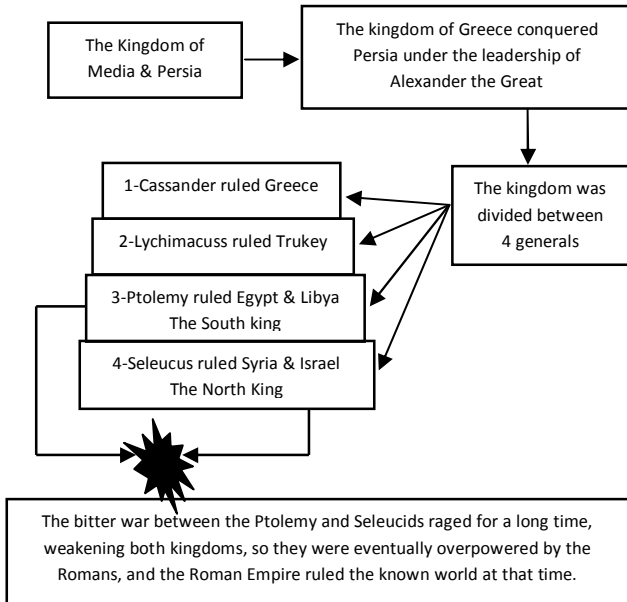
The kingdom of Egypt was ruled by the Ptolemy's. This was called the southern kingdom. Syria and Israel were ruled by the Seleucid Dynasty. This was the northern kingdom. They were the two powerful kingdoms of the four formed

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after the death of Alexander the Great. As they fought bitter wars, they were weakened, allowing the Roman Empire to become stronger and to finally take over the whole Greek empire.

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The summary of the last vision



Daniel chapter 12 seals the book with the final prophecy regarding the end of the world and the resurrection and judgment. It also mentions the end of Daniel's life.

The great trouble

"At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands [watch] over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, [Even] to that time . And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book" (Dan 12 : 1).

Archangel Gabriel informs Daniel about the great trouble which means the end of the world, and what accompanies it from persecution of God's children who refuse to follow the antichrist. He reassures him that God will not leave

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them, but will send them the Archangel Michael who is appointed to take care of mankind. Everyone whose name is written in the book of life will be saved. **"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life"** (Rev 3 : 5)

The general resurrection and Judgment

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame [and] everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Dan 12 : 2 - 4)

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After the time of great trouble, the antichrist will die and the resurrection and judgment will come. Daniel here uses New Testament language. The dead are asleep and they will wake up from their sleep or physical death, as Christ mentioned to His disciples when He was talking about Lazarus. "Lazarus our beloved had slept but I will go to wake him up".

Daniel the prophet mentioned to us two fates: eternal life or everlasting shame and contempt. The wise, who understand God's word and follow Him and those who turn sinners away from sin will shine like bright stars. **"Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins"** (James 5 : 20)

And at the end the archangel Gabriel asked Daniel to hide the words

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and seal the book (a mysterious book) until the end of time (the time of the end was still far). Those who read it will increase their knowledge and wisdom as they understand the signs of the end of the days. When the prophecies are fulfilled you will be assured that God had informed us accurately from the beginning. Here God commanded Daniel to seal the prophecy, as opposed to what happened with St. John's Revelation: **"Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand"** (Rev 22 : 10)

The terrifying words

"Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And [one] said to the man clothed in linen, who [was] above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders [be].

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Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who [was] above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that [it shall be] for a time, times, and half [a time;] and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these [things] shall be finished. Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what [shall be] the end of these [things]. And he said, "Go [your way,] Daniel, for the words [are] closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan 12 : 5 - 9)

The dialogue between Daniel and the angel ends and he sees two angels standing on the banks of the River Tigris. The man wearing linen is the Son of God, Jesus Christ and He has the authority over the rivers and seas, ordering them to be calm and they obey. (Mark 4:41; 6:49)

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One of the angels, pitying the people, asks Christ when all that trouble would end. The answer is a time, times and a half a time (three and a half). This could be the second half of the last week of the seventy week prophecy.

The shattering of the power of the holy people, i.e. the Jews means the end of the temple sacrifices. This could be in the near future, when Titus entered the Jerusalem destroying it and the temple, or the antichrist dominance over the people of God.

The whole experience was overwhelming for Daniel and he was ordered to rest and seal the book. He was reassured that a time will come when it will be fulfilled and when it will all be made clear.

The effect of the trouble

"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. And from the time [that] the daily [sacrifice] is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, [there shall be] one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed [is] he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Dan 12:10-12).

Just as metals respond differently to fire, so the nature of humans reacts differently to hardships. While some are purified and strengthened by trials, others are broken by them. Gold is purified by fire losing all impurities. While tin burns and takes on more impurities. **"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is**

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filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." (Rev 22 : 11)

The time of great trouble and persecution of the Jews at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanies was mentioned =1290 (near future); whereas the distant future represents the persecution of God's people at the hands of the antichrist. Blessed is he who bears these hard days and be patient until the second coming of Jesus Christ = 1335 which means after the great trouble ends with 45 days. (Represent the death of Antiochus and starting reconsecrating the altar)

The death of the prophet Daniel

"But you, go [your way] till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (Dan 12 : 13)

The time comes for Daniel to walk the path of all human beings, and rest after a long life full of witnessing for his God, a life dedicated to the faithful worshipping of God, full of tribulations but also blessings.

He will be raised once more after his repose to face judgment and eternal life with Jesus Christ, whom he saw in visions during his life, but then he will see Him in His glory, for no eye has seen or ear has heard or human heart has realized what God has prepared for His beloved.

It is thought that the prophet Daniel passed away in year 534 B.C. The

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Coptic Church celebrates his feast on 23 Baramhat (first of April) annually. May God grant us his spiritual insight to know how to live our lives?

May his prayers be with us all

Amen